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SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

Bartók · Stravinsky

Bartók Concerto for Orchestra, Sz116

Stravinsky The Rite of Spring

Park Avenue Chamber Symphony Orchestra /

David Bernard

Recursive (F) RC2057001 (73' • DDD)



The website of the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony ([chambersymphony.com](#)) lists two dozen recordings, a healthy number for an orchestra whose members make their livings in vocations other than music. Their latest disc is a pairing of iconic and challenging works of the 20th century – Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring* and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra.

The performances can't be called competitive with classic recordings by a host of international orchestras and conductors, yet music director David Bernard and his New York musicians turn in committed and forceful traversals of these formidable scores. Stravinsky's jolting ballet music is no longer the fearsome undertaking it once was – even youth orchestras play it with relative ease – and the Park Avenue contingent (expanded to fulfil the work's instrumentation) sound confident through many of the violent and mysterious episodes. Some details are slightly out of place in the rhythmic puzzles, and the playing veers toward the loud side of things. Even so, the account has thrilling moments when you can feel the musicians giving their all as they tear into the work's visceral drama.

The Bartók also receives urgent treatment. Bernard is sensitive to both the eerie and the jubilant aspects that make the piece such a singular experience. Again, the players of the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony make their way through the score with purpose and sophistication. The rousing pages, especially the finale, might send you rushing to turn down the volume, but the performance is mostly a testament to the orchestra's sheer love of music-making.

Donald Rosenberg

GRAMOPHONE talks to...

David Bernard

The conductor on recording Stravinsky and Bartók with his New York orchestra

What is special for you about The Rite and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra?

Both works immerse listeners in complete sonic worlds formed through distinct musical languages. Each composer uses introductory material to methodically condition the listener's hearing, delivering an experience both transformative and holistic.

Tell us about your new edition of The Rite.

Despite many editions, the score and parts have been riddled with errors and inconsistencies. Resolving these issues is a complex process – reviewing various editions, manuscript sources and even Stravinsky's transcriptions of his own works. Preparing for this recording, I collaborated with Clinton Nieweg, retired librarian of the Philadelphia Orchestra. Supervising the latest edition for Edwin F Kalmus, he had called on other orchestral librarians, some of the most knowledgeable people in the business! He and I shared additional inconsistencies and corrections. Over eight months, we corrected numerous textual issues related to



articulation, pitch, dynamics and doubling. So the edition used in this recording is the most authentic yet, we believe.

What differences do the revisions make?

These adjustments clarify the textures and the voice leading. Despite the highly chromatic and sometimes dissonant nature of the work, the changes bring out a powerful tonal coherence. It was a revelation.

What's special about working with the Park Avenue Chamber Symphony?

I have had the pleasure of working with them for 16 years. They're a very responsive orchestra with a deep sense of sound and style. Next we're recording a new edition of Stravinsky's *Firebird Suite* (1919) on which I'm again working with Clinton Nieweg.

Bowles

'Complete Piano Works, Vol 2'

El Bejuco^a. Blue Mountain Ballads

(arr Kasparov). Café sin nombre^a. Carretera de Estepona (The High Way to Estepona)^a. Colloque sentimental (arr Gold/Fizdale).

Cross Country. Four Miniatures^a. Impasse de Tombouctou^b. Night Waltz. Nocturne. Orosi^b.

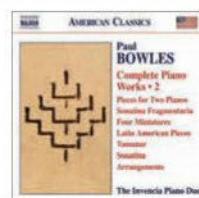
Pastorela: Caminata (arr Gold/Fizdale). Piano Sonatina^a. Sayula^b. Sonatina fragmentaria^b.

Tamaran^a. Theseus and Maldoror^b. Turkey Trot (arr Gold/Fizdale)

The Invencía Piano Duo

^aAndrey Kasparov, ^bOksana Lutsyshyn pfs)

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559787 (59' • DDD)



Paul BOWLES
Complete Piano Works • 2
Plans for Two Pianos
Four Fragments
Four Stories
Sonatas
Arrangements
The Invencía Piano Duo

The acclaim that Paul Bowles earned as a fiction writer from his late thirties until his death in 1999 at the age of 88 has largely obscured his early composing career. If Bowles the wordsmith was dark and brooding (a godfather of sorts to 1950s Beat Generation prose spinners), Bowles the composer was vivacious, witty and prone to pulling surprising harmonic rabbits out of magic hats. Like its predecessor, Naxos's

TIANWA YANG

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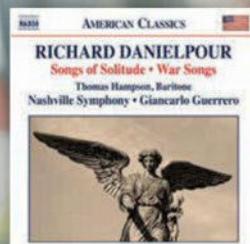
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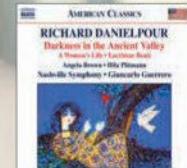
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Danielpour is wonderfully economical in his orchestration of the accompaniment, and Guerrero gets a beautifully clear and balanced sound from his orchestra. New music is rarely this satisfying to listen to.

- JOHN TERAUDS, *Musical Toronto*

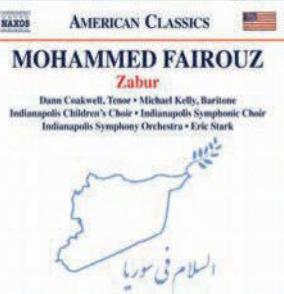


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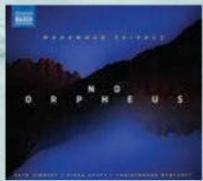
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- GEORGE ADAMS, *American Record Guide*

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Yuriy Bekker: performing violin-and-piano works by Copland and Korngold

second of two discs devoted to Bowles's complete piano music features works that are modest in scope yet generous in charm, invention and pianistic ingenuity.

The opening selection, *Night Waltz*, runs rampant with slippery modulations, great yet fleeting tunes and counterpoint in all directions, while *Nocturne*'s dense chords convey a more austere impression. The titles of four short solo pieces written between 1933 and 1939 may have been inspired by Bowles's literary tastes and exotic travels, but not their neo-classical, quasi-Poulencian musical content. At first, the three-movement Piano Sonatina seems to be a stylistic mongrel (Prokofiev meets ragtime? Bach meets Scriabin?), albeit one trained by a strong individual.

Like Copland, Bowles could adapt his style to tuneful and populist ends, as in the three Latin American pieces, yet he also also tossed down lean, craggy, uncompromisingly modernist gauntlets such as the 1947 *Tamanar*. Conversely, three short pieces arranged by the American piano duo Gold and Fizdale (who premiered both *Night Waltz* and Bowles's keyboard masterpiece, the Sonata for two pianos) splendidly represent Bowles's eclectic, cosmopolitan persona.

Pianists Andrey Kasparov and Oksana Lutsyshyn deliver technically adroit and

stylistically sound performances that capture the full measure of Bowles's musical imagination. Perhaps the last of the four *Blue Mountain Ballads* on Tennessee Williams texts arranged by Kasparov for piano duet, 'Sugar in the cane', sounds less idiomatically 'bluesy' than expected, but that's a minor nitpick. All serious lovers of American piano music should investigate this disc, along with Vol 1. Both are graced by Kasparov's scholarly and informative booklet-notes. **Jed Distler**

Copland · Korngold

'Twentieth Century Duos'

Copland Violin Sonata. Two Pieces Korngold

Much Ado About Nothing, Op 11 – Suite. *Die tote Stadt* – Mariettas Lied; Tanzlied des Pierrot

Yuriy Bekker vn Andrew Armstrong pf

Navona Ⓜ NV6046 (53' • DDD)



Erich Wolfgang Korngold and Aaron Copland may not seem to have much in common beyond the fact that they both composed Hollywood film scores during the 1930s and '40s. But the new recording 'Twentieth Century Duos' reveals another connection: these composers wrote pieces

for violin and piano. As played by violinist Yuriy Bekker and pianist Andrew Armstrong, the music is delightful and lyrical, exuberant and even earthy.

Korngold was in his early twenties when he composed the works presented here. Both his incidental music to *Much Ado About Nothing* and the opera *Die tote Stadt* received their premieres in 1920 and helped to put the composer on the international map. The *Much Ado* music was originally scored for orchestra but Korngold made an arrangement for violin and piano (he played the latter in certain performances) that comprises four movements of characteristically colourful and poetic content. Two arias from *Die tote Stadt* – Marietta's Lied and Tanzlied des Pierrot – are touching even without words.

The Copland fare hails from the 1920s and '40s. The composer wrote the *Two Pieces* in Paris in the 1920s, when jazz was the rage. The two movements overflow with bluesy and rambunctious spirit, the latter in full splendour in 'Ukelele Serenade'. The Violin Sonata, from 1942, reflects the solemnity and hope that must have been on Copland's mind during the Second World War.

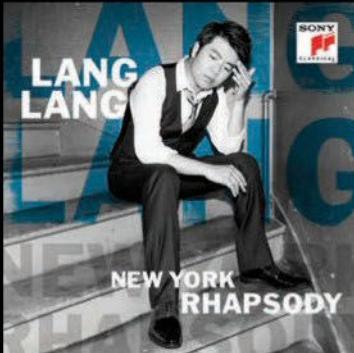
Bekker and Armstrong are ideal champions of both composers, playing as equals with eloquent and articulate vibrancy. **Donald Rosenberg**

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James Conlon, the Cincinnati Symphony and the May Festival Chorus perform R Nathaniel Dett's oratorio *The Ordering of Moses*

Dett

The Ordering of Moses

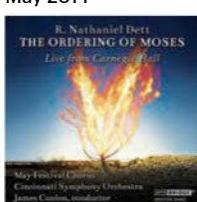
Latonia Moore sop Ronnita Nicole Miller mez

Rodrick Dixon ten Donny Ray Albert bar

May Festival Chorus; Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra / James Conlon

Bridge Ⓛ BRIDGE9462 (49' • DDD)

Recorded live at Carnegie Hall, New York, May 2014



How is it possible that a work as soaring and powerful as R Nathaniel Dett's

The Ordering of Moses could have languished for so long? The oratorio had its premiere by the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra and May Festival Chorus in 1937, after which it received a handful of performances around the US, including one in Cincinnati in 1967. Now here's another by the Cincinnati forces, recorded live at Carnegie Hall in May 2014 under May Festival director James Conlon.

Dett (1882-1943) was a Canadian-born black composer who fused African American folksongs with classical traditions, especially Romanticism. His art is at its peak in *The Ordering of Moses*,

which presents the youthful Moses as he develops the strength to lead his people to the Promised Land. Those last words come from the spiritual 'Go down, Moses,' which Dett employs as a leitmotif to unify the work. Most of the text comes from the books of Exodus and Lamentations. It is a score of bountiful beauty and richness, with vivid choral and orchestral writing that illuminates the messages of faith. Echoes of Brahms and Wagner can be heard along the way, though filtered through Dett's individual sensibility.

Conlon leads the Cincinnati musicians in a performance of radiant intensity. The chorus, prepared by Robert Porco, are in glorious communal voice and the Cincinnati Symphony blend elegance with vitality. The excellent vocal soloists include tenor Rodrick Dixon as Moses and Donny Ray Albert in the dual roles of The Voice of God and The Word.

Donald Rosenberg

Prokofiev

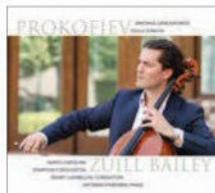
Sinfonia concertante, Op 125^a

Cello Sonata, Op 119^b

Zuill Bailey vc ^bNatasha Paremski pf ^aNorth

Carolina Symphony Orchestra / Grant Llewellyn

Steinway & Sons Ⓛ STNS30057 (62' • DDD)



It is still difficult to fathom the Soviet regime's treatment of Prokofiev and Shostakovich for composing music Stalin and his henchmen heard as too modern, not to mention politically tinged. The two Prokofiev works that cellist Zuill Bailey performs on his new disc might be construed as commentaries on Soviet life, but they also could simply be considered prime examples of the composer's deeply expressive and potent art.

The *Sinfonia concertante* was originally a cello concerto for Rostropovich; the composer revised the score and finally gave it a name rooted in the Classical era. The orchestra does play a prominent role in the work but the cello part is one of those wide-ranging challenges, at turns eloquent, angry and exuberant. Bailey is a master of the music's emotional extremes, playing with a rich, throbbing sound that he can scale down to a haunting whisper. He teams seamlessly with the superb North Carolina Symphony Orchestra under music director Grant Llewellyn. An earlier work for Rostropovich, the Cello Sonata in C,

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is another opportunity to hear Prokofiev's distinctive voice in all its poetic and invigorating glory. Bailey exults in the music's lyricism, just as he savours the charm and ferocity that are so ingrained in this composer's sonic sensibility. The piano part is equally demanding, and Natasha Paremski brings exceptional finesse, clarity, and intensity to the score, always mindful of balances with the cello. Throughout this stimulating performance, you get the impression that the musicians are inhabiting the dramatic narratives. **Donald Rosenberg**

'Modernists'

Lennon/McCartney Revolution 9 (arr Marks) **Orfe** Journeyman **Read Thomas** Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour **Rihm** Will Sound **Varèse** Poème électronique (arr Hause) **Wuorinen** Big Spinoff **Alarm Will Sound**

Cantaloupe F CA21117 (39' • DDD)



Each of the six pieces here, all of about the same length and at similar moderate speeds, is an exercise in getting into the heads of avant-garde classical music creators and trending creative notions. Each represents a significant contribution to the growing repertoire of classical music that's being created, as Verve's new 'Re:works' compilation demonstrates on a mass-market level, for parallel-universe audiences who prefer their classical music on vinyl in clubs spun by DJs: reworked, remixed, remashed and otherwise deconstructed.

The most spectacularly audacious is Evan Hause's ingenious reorchestration entirely for acoustic instruments of Edgard Varèse's iconic *Poème électronique*, which works so naturally that it becomes essentially a new piece. The most simply audacious is Matt Marks's arrangement of 'Revolution 9', which turns The Beatles' raucous, sly descent into musical chaos – which, reflectively, looks like a descent into the social chaos that killed John Lennon – into a surreally elegant rethink rising to occasional Wagnerian heights and ending in incongruously collegiate cheers of 'Block that kick! And hold that line!'

Of the four pieces written for Alan Pierson's 23-piece ensemble, Augusta Read Thomas's potent *Final Soliloquy of the Interior Paramour* packs the power and punch of an operatic scena, using two Wallace Stevens poems vocalised by alto Kirsten Sollek and countertenor Caleb Burhans to explore intensely radiant

extremes; and Wolfgang Rihm is at his relentlessly anticipatory best in *Will Sound*, which ends in biblical waves of sound.

Two entertaining instrumental workouts emerge: Charles Wuorinen's manic *Big Spinoff* and AWS pianist John Orfe's mini-concerto *Journeyman*. **Laurence Vittes**

'Rhythm of Silence'

Di Fiore Miniature Eisenga Theme from Wiek Mellits Agu Sommacal I Buried the Truth Susman Quiet Rhythms: Prologue and Action - No 4; No 9; No 18

Erika Tazawa pf

Belarca F BELARCA005 (55' • DDD)



Elements of minimalism, repeating figurations and obsessive gestures

are the threads linking all of the works on this beautiful disc. The three selections from Francesco Di Fiore's *Miniature* range from toccata-like movement to a sparse and stark ballad. Douwe Eisenga's *Theme from Wiek* slowly builds up from alternating three- and two-note phrases in both hands. It may be 'new-agey' on the surface, yet genuine compositional rigour governs the unfolding momentum.

If the left-hand ostinato and descending four-note scales that open Matteo Sommacal's *I Buried the Truth* seem pleasantly innocuous, huge sonorities and bigtime virtuosity are lurking around the corner, just ripe for pianist Erika Tazawa's powerful fingers to gleefully relish and devour. Half of the first movement of Marc Mellits's tryptich *Agu* consists of high-lying slow-moving chords. The second half lives in the lower registers, where the slow chords resemble, for lack of a better analogy, a 'Keith Jarrett hymn' (and that's a compliment!). 'Triumph of the Water Witch' is pure rock-out power chords: Prokofiev meets Jerry Lee Lewis. The conclusion, 'You're a Fake!', gently and most attractively carves nine minutes from the aforementioned Keith Jarrett hymnal.

I haven't yet mentioned producer William Susman's short pieces interspersed throughout the recital, because I'm saving the best for last. Susman achieves texturally shimmering and harmonically ravishing results through subtle voice-leading and assiduously controlled structures. For example, in *Prologue and Action* No 18, the opening two-note ostinato pattern gives way to slower music and wider intervals, like a flower blooming before your eyes. Although

the sound is a tad dry for music that would benefit from a more resonant patina, such intelligent programme-building and committed performances warrant serious attention and exposure. **Jed Distler**

'Transitions'

Davidovsky Synchronisms No 3 **Fulmer** Speak of the Spring **Gosfield** ...and a Five Spot. Four Roses **Oliver La Rosa** flexura **Reich** Cello Counterpoint **Thorvaldsdóttir** Transitions

Michael Nicolas vc

Sono Luminus F DSL92202 (61' • DDD)



On his debut album for Sono Luminus, Brooklyn Rider's new cellist Michael Nicolas integrates classical music's 20th-century roots into his championing of new composition. The timing of the tracks, too, seems entirely symbolic of musical continuity: 61'16". Armed with a résumé that ranges from touring with South Korea's classical boy-band Ensemble Ditto to playing with the International Contemporary Ensemble (and directing a residency at the 2015 Havana Contemporary Music Festival, Nicolas displays an international variety of sources, hair-raising chops and a tendency to exaggerate with amazing sensitivity.

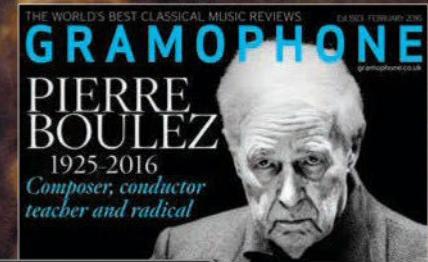
The music ranges from Mario Davidovsky's iconic *Synchronisms* for cello and composed electronics – retro now but groundbreaking when it was written 50 years ago – to brand new music by four relative kids who are basically writing today's classical music as we speak. Nicolas in his booklet-notes describes the emotional pairings he is drawn to: the 'intensity and hyperexpression in the Davidovsky and Oliver, fragility and expansiveness in Fulmer and Thorvaldsdóttir, rhythmic drive and transformation in Reich and Gosfield'.

His journey through cellistic time and space includes Jaime Oliver La Rosa's excursion into the future, using his MANO hand-movement recorder to fashion his ambiguously titled *flexura*. Anna Thorvaldsdóttir's title-track, the only piece for cello alone, explores how the cello is tuned and makes beautiful sounds. In the midst of it all one relative icon resides. That would be Steve Reich, whose multitracked *Cello Counterpoint* octet remains as astounding as ever, and assertively mainstream. Sono Luminus's fabled recording studio in western Virginia captures it all without missing a beat. **Laurence Vittes**

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Accolades come in many forms. You hold in your hands our annual celebration of the very best classical music recordings of the year, our tribute to the extraordinary life-affirming music-making from the greatest artists in the world. It's stating the obvious that such achievements do not happen over-night, the result purely of artistic inspiration. For all the interpretative genius that elevates the technically brilliant to the summit of artistic excellence, all is nought without the decades of devoted, hard graft – technical exercises, forensic exploration of the music, experimentation, consolidation. As the old joke about how to get to Carnegie Hall goes: practice, practice, practice. But then, only then, is that visionary extra layer able to make all the difference.

As I write, I'm still feeling a glow of patriotic pride at the phenomenal success of our British athletes in the Olympics. Sport/music analogies are easily made, and it's possible to take them too far – for a start, winning isn't so absolute in art. We bestow Awards on our winners, which indeed have emerged from a rigorous voting process, but unlike in sport the status of the first across the line is more nuanced, the definitive and unanswerable cruelty of the clock does not apply, and anyway, we're rarely comparing like-for-like. Any recording which made it to the category shortlists, let alone found itself before the final Recording of the Year panel, is worthy of joining your collection.

But as we all marvel at the path of total dedication, invariably and necessarily one of sacrifice, of our Olympic victors, let us remember that for the soloists,



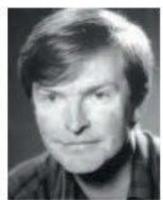
singers and conductors here being honoured, that path has been no less one of single-minded pursuit, quite possibly one that started even earlier than that of a cyclist or swimmer.

Most insights into the lives of athletes – whether interviews, biographies or those moving displays of emotion on winning or losing – reveal that the will-to-win is only part of the story, just as a musician's technical prowess is only part of theirs. Endeavour exists within the context of a life – soul and spirituality are a crucial part of the mix. In a fascinating step, the Estonian Olympic Committee has just appointed conductor Kristjan Järvi as the first non-sports person to become a member. Partly it's to explore the role music can play in inspiring people (I wonder what he'll have athletes listening to on their giant headphones when getting into the zone!). But it's also to bring to sport a fresh angle of understanding about how the physical and spiritual relate which, as we know, they so crucially do in music-making. As with athleticism, so with art: we are all complex and comprehensive beings, perhaps those able to attain the extraordinary levels required to win *Gramophone* Awards (or Olympic medals) more than most.

I do hope you enjoy our Award-winning recordings – gold medals to them all. And two new initiatives this year offer you an even closer ring-side seat: the entire Awards ceremony will be available to stream on **medici.tv** and **classicfm.com**, while a special CD featuring performances by all the Award-winners is available exclusively from Amazon.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'How lucky we were, the generation who grew up in the heyday of The Three Tenors,' says **RICHARD FAIRMAN**, author of this month's Icons. 'My memories of José Carreras are as vivid now as they were when I first saw him at the start of his career. So involving, so immediate – a very special singer.'



'Anyone who loves *Gurrelieder* talks about it like a child presented with a Christmas stocking, and Edward Gardner was no different,' says **PETER QUANTRILL**, who interviewed the conductor for this issue's Musician and Score. 'But then – would you believe it? – discussing Schoenberg over coffee can be a lot of fun.'



'What is it about Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony which eludes all but the finest and wisest conductors?' asks **RICHARD OSBORNE**, author of this month's Collection. 'After spending six months with a work I fondly imagined I understood after a lifetime's listening, I suspect I know the answer.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • David Allen • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Liam Cagney • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Andrew Farach-Colton • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts, which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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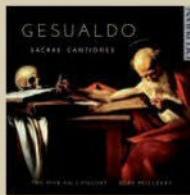


CD34170

Der Wanderer: Schubert Lieder
Roderick Williams, Iain Burnside

Following the critical acclaim for Iain Burnside's partnership with soprano Ailish Tynan in the first volume of Burnside's Schubert song series on Delphian, this second volume sees him partnered by another friend and long-term collaborator, baritone Roderick Williams. Their lovingly designed programme takes its tone from the strand of journeying and farewell that threads through Schubert's song output. Burnside's pianism is as masterful and vivid as ever, while Williams, fresh from his triumph at the 2016 Royal Philharmonic Society Awards, combines drama and intellect and shows the qualities that continue to endear him both to critics and to audiences.

'Exile and expatriation have seldom sounded so personal as in Williams's intimate evocation ... The symbiosis of singer and pianist is evident throughout' — Norman Lebrecht, La Scena Musicale, FIVE STARS



CD34176

Gesualdo: Sacrae Cantiones, Book I
The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery

The gruesome murder of his first wife and her lover in flagrante, his mistreatment of his second wife, his isolation at his family seat and his penchant for masochism and flagellation have all fuelled the myth of Carlo Gesualdo, Prince of Venosa, as madman, deviant and tortured pariah: qualities seen to be replicated in his rule-defying music. Yet his compositional talent was prodigious, and this idiomatic and committed reading of his five-voice motets — marking the composer's 450th birthday year — invites us to marvel at their pictorial immediacy, surprising chromaticism, and unique blend of melisma and homophony, in music that betrays his obsession with his own personal sin, remorse and need for absolution.

'stunning' — Andrew McGregor, Record Review, BBC Radio 3



CD34164

Stravinsky: Choral Works

Choir of St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh & Scottish Chamber Orchestra Soloists / Duncan Ferguson; Ruby Hughes soprano, Nicholas Mulroy tenor

Since taking the helm of the St Mary's choir in Edinburgh, Duncan Ferguson has directed them in four composer-led recording projects — Taverner, John Sheppard, Bruckner and Gabriel Jackson — every one of them highly acclaimed. Now, in Ferguson's most ambitious project to date, the choir are joined by players from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra and vocal soloists Ruby Hughes and Nicholas Mulroy to record major works by the twentieth century's most influential composer. The choir rarely get to perform Stravinsky's *Mass* in its full version with wind instruments accompanying rather than organ ('We love it!' proclaimed the choristers), while a performance of the *Cantata* with cathedral choristers rather than an adult choir is rare indeed. Also included are Stravinsky's 'completions' of three *cantiones sacrae* by Gesualdo; their weird contrapuntal twists and turns are relished by this intelligent, committed choir, and provide a stark contrast to the austere simplicity of Stravinsky's own short sacred choruses.

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NEW on ONDINE

A black and white photograph of two men, Christian Tetzlaff and Lars Vogt, looking down at a violin and bow. They are both wearing dark shirts. The Ondine logo is visible on the left side of the image.

ODE 1284-2

Recording of the Month

A black and white photograph of a stained glass rose window with light rays emanating from it. To the right, text reads: 'ONDINE', 'ERIKS EŠENVALDS', 'ST LUKE PASSION SACRED WORKS', 'Ieva Parša', 'Jānis Kurševs', 'Daumants Kalniņš', 'Latvian Radio Choir', 'Sinfonietta Riga', and 'Sigvards Klava'. The Gramophone Choice logo is also present.

ODE 1247-2

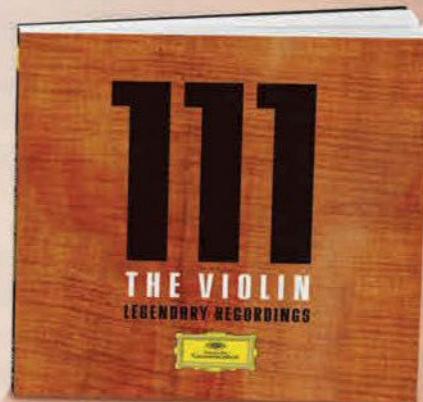
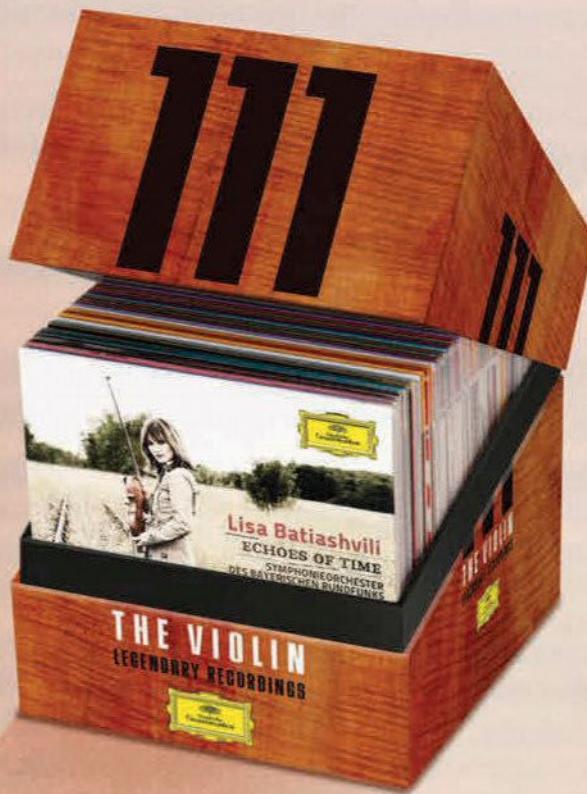
'One could hardly ask for better performers in this repertoire than the Latvian Radio Choir under the inspired direction of Sigvards Klava, and Ondine's recording, made in the St John's Church in Riga, is a model of clarity. A superb release.'

Ivan Moody, August 2016

★★★★★ Choir and Organ Magazine, September/October 2016

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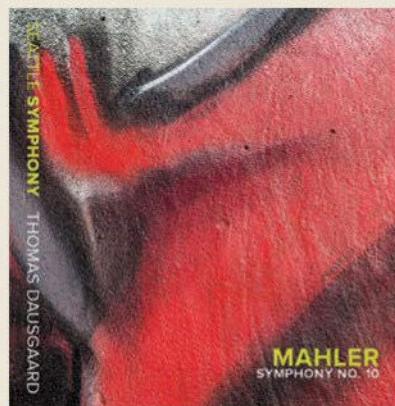


GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice G

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews

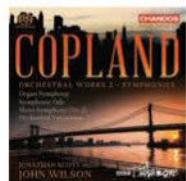


RECORDING OF THE MONTH



MAHLER
Symphony No 10
Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard
Seattle Symphony Media
► DAVID GUTMAN'S REVIEW IS ON PAGE 46

This is a very impressive Mahler Tenth. Playing is of the highest order throughout, but, as is crucial in this work, Dausgaard's vision is both compelling and beautifully conveyed.



COPLAND
Orchestral Works, Vol 2
BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Wilson
Chandos
Disc two in Wilson's

Copland series takes us to less well-known works, but with the rigour of understanding and complete conviction that are this conductor's hallmark.

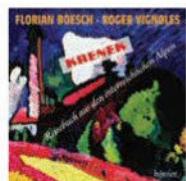
► REVIEW ON PAGE 50



CHOPIN Mazurkas
Pavel Kolesnikov pf
Hyperion

The young Russian pianist – a member of the BBC New Generation Artist scheme and former Honens Prize winner – shows a remarkable command and originality in this superb Chopin set.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 83



KRENEK Reisebuch
ZEMLINSKY Songs
Florian Boesch bar
Roger Vignoles pf
Hyperion

Exceptional Lieder singing from baritone Florian Boesch – engagingly communicative throughout – in a perfect partnership with pianist Roger Vignoles.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 98



DVD/BLU-RAY
BRITTEN The Rape of Lucretia
Sols; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Leo Hussain
Opus Arte

A chance to see director Fiona Shaw's powerful response to Britten's opera – its first return to Glyndebourne since the 1946 premiere – with excellent singing and playing throughout.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 110



B DEAN Shadow Music
Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Brett Dean
BIS
BIS continues its advocacy of the

Australian composer and ex-Berlin Philharmonic viola player's music with this captivating disc of works from the past decade or so.

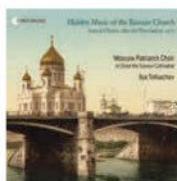
► REVIEW ON PAGE 50



D SCARLATTI
Keyboard Sonatas, Vol 4
Pierre Hantaï hpd
Mirare

Scarlatti series serves up another deeply thought-out recording, both eloquent and entertaining, and extraordinarily skilled in execution.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 89



HIDDEN MUSIC OF THE RUSSIAN CHURCH
Moscow Patriarchal Choir / Ilya Tolkachev
Christophorus

Truly heartfelt performances of this Russian repertoire, recorded in the atmospheric acoustic of the choir's vast cathedral home.

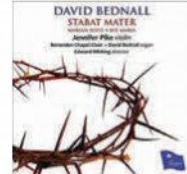
► REVIEW ON PAGE 107



MENDELSSOHN
String Quartets Nos 3 & 5
Parker Quartet
Nimbus Alliance

The Parker Quartet continue their Mendelssohn exploration with a masterclass in ensemble collaboration, rich in ideas and unity of vision. A very fine disc from an impressive group.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 73



BEDNALL Stabat mater.
Ave Maria. Marian Suite
Benenden Chapel Choir / Edward Whiting
Regent

The British composer already has a growing discography; this new addition from Regent focuses on his substantial and imaginative setting of the deeply moving Marian hymn.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 94



GOLDMARK
Die Königin von Saba
Sols; Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Fabrice Bollon
CPO

A once hugely popular work, now rarely heard (let alone recorded), Goldmark's opera gets a superb performance in another exciting CPO set.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 113



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
BEETHOVEN
'Hammerklavier' Sonata
Grigory Sokolov pf

Sony Classical
An impressive snapshot of an early stage in the career of one of today's most extraordinary artists.

►

REVIEW ON PAGE 80



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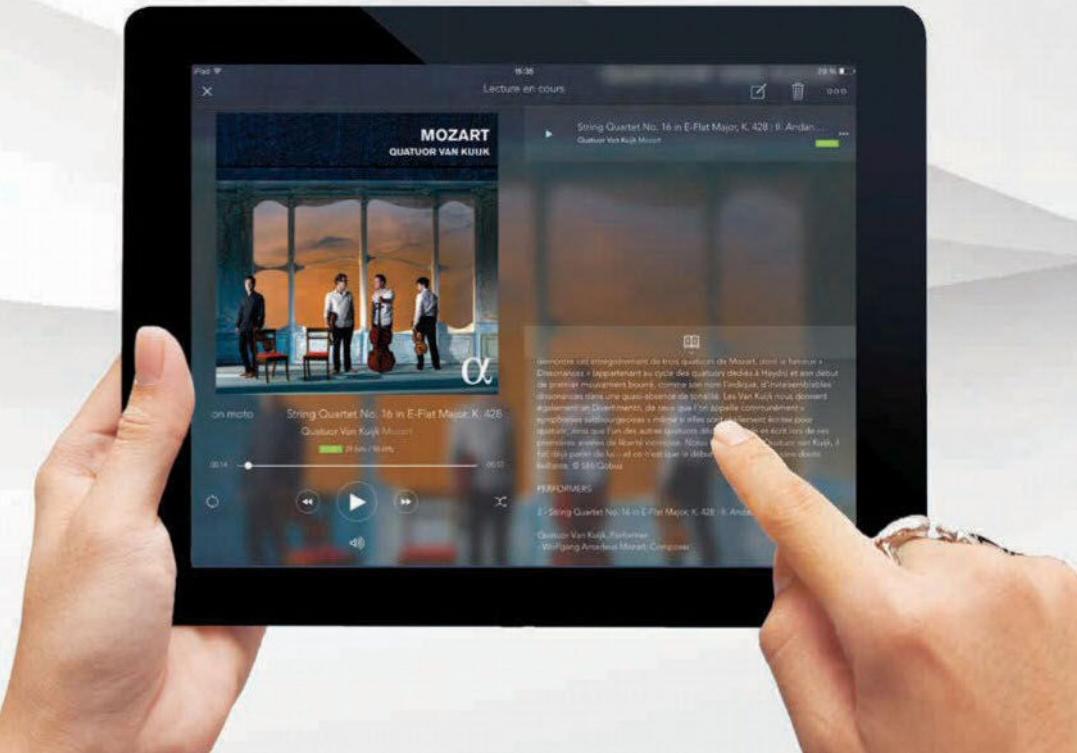


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WITH THE MULTI-ETHNIC STAR
ORCHESTRA (MESTO)
(8 October 2016)

CARACALLA DANCE THEATRE
SAILING THROUGH TIME
(19 May 2016)

JIHAD AKL
(3 December 2016)

MOHAMMED ABDOU
(26, 27 January 2017)

CONCERT

BEETHOVEN'S 9 TH SYMPHONY
RAI NATIONAL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
AND THE SWEDISH RADIO CHOIR
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A BROADWAY GALA
WITH SIMON KEENLYSIDE
(31 December 2017)

PLÁCIDO DOMINGO
IN CONCERT
(11 January 2017)

PLÁCIDO DOMINGO
CONDUCTS ROYAL OMAN
SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
(13 January 2017)

ANNA NETREBKO
AND YUSIF EYVAZOV
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FOR THE RECORD



The SWR Symphony Orchestra, which has been merged with the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra

Two orchestras give their final performances as they face merger

The SWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden and Freiburg, and the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra have both given their final performances. In 2012 it was decided by the SWR Broadcasting Council that the two orchestras should be merged for financial reasons, in spite of the fact that the ensembles have very different performance traditions – the SWR SO was renowned for its commitment to contemporary music while the Stuttgart RSO focused more

standard classical repertoire under the likes of Sir Roger Norrington and Stéphane Denève.

And it was Norrington who was on the podium for the Stuttgart RSO's final concert at the BBC Proms – a programme of Berlioz, Beethoven and Brahms – while the SWR SO signed off with two concerts in Freiburg, led by their Music Director François-Xavier Roth, which included Ives's *The Unanswered Question* and Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

The 2016 Gramophone Awards on Medici.tv and CD

This year's *Gramophone* Classical Music Awards ceremony was live-streamed by Medici.tv, and you can watch the entire show on their website free for 90 days, after which time it will be archived for Medici's subscribers.

Gramophone has also produced an Awards compilation CD featuring tracks from all of the Award-winning albums. The CD is available from Amazon for £4.99.

Esa-Pekka Salonen joins Finnish National Opera and Ballet

The composer and conductor Esa-Pekka Salonen has been appointed the first-ever Artist in Association at the Finnish National Opera and Ballet. He has signed a five-year contract, beginning this season with *Elektra*. He will 'assume

a diverse and comprehensive role as a conductor, composer, artistic advisor and ambassador'. Salonen will conduct the FNOB's new production of *The Ring* in 2019.

Kristjan Järvi becomes Estonia's first non-sport Olympic ambassador

Conductor Kristjan Järvi has been selected by the Estonian Olympic Committee to be the first non-athlete to become an Olympic Ambassador for the country. His role will include encouraging young people to engage with sport through music. Järvi said: 'Music is an inspirational force, it helps people to fulfil their potential and in sport this is vital. Every sportsman and woman tends to use music in some way to inspire, whether it is in the gym or prior to them starting a race, so it is a natural step to see how this can be expanded upon.'

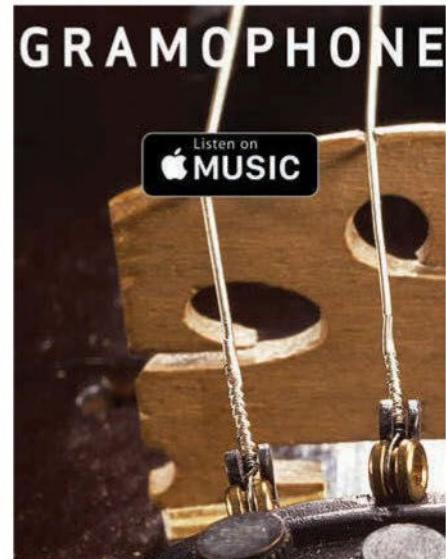
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APPLE MUSIC PLAYLISTS

As the leading voice on recorded classical music since 1923 and with an unparalleled panel of expert reviewers, for *Gramophone*, playlist curation on Apple Music – a music streaming service which now boasts over 15 million paid subscribers – is a natural next step, and complements the explorations into music streaming that we have made so far with Qobuz.

Reflecting the breadth and diversity of Apple Music's audience, *Gramophone*'s playlists will explore an equally broad range of musical areas, always aiming to present



interesting and unexpected juxtapositions of repertoire and performer to provide the most gratifying listening experience. Our curator page launched with 15 playlists, taking in everything from the contemporary music of John Corigliano and Colin Matthews to celebrations of the artistry of Frederica von Stade, Bernard Haitink and Paavo Järvi.

And to reflect the broader interests of listeners who will encounter our playlists on Apple Music, we have produced playlists that explore particular moods, beginning with 'contemplation' and 'celebration'. There is also a playlist called 'Variations on the Goldbergs', a compilation performance of the *Goldberg Variations* featuring a different performer for each movement – it's quite something!

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MOZART

PIANO CONCERTOS

with Gábor Takács-Nagy
conducting the Manchester Camerata

MOZART

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Piano Concerto in B flat major, KV 456

Divertimento in B flat major, KV 137

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GRAMOPHONE

CLASSICAL MUSIC AWARDS 2016

Celebrating the best of the best

I can't recall a year of listening that has provided such enjoyment. Every category has offered discoveries and vivid new imaginings of the classics in equal measure. And nowhere is this better illustrated than in our Recording of the Year – for which you only have to turn the page!

When asked what is the purpose of the Awards, I invariably talk about stopping the clock for a kind of annual health check. Well, the pronouncement this year is extremely encouraging: young talent is extraordinarily well represented to the extent that our Artist of the Year, at 25, is actually younger than our Young Artist of the Year, at 33 (it's not the first time this has happened!). Vilde Frang, Igor Levit, Sabine Devieilhe, Andris Nelsons and the Heath Quartet all demonstrate that vibrant, imaginative musicianship is abundant in the younger generation, and, more tellingly, they all have something special to say in their chosen repertoires.

The Awards' judging process starts back in the spring when we compile an initial list of the 130 Editor's Choice recordings drawn from the year's 13 issues (the period of eligibility embraces any recording reviewed in our pages between June 2015 and May 2016). These are then supplemented by recordings that our

*Editor-in-Chief James Jolly
introduces this year's
Award-winners*

In association with



reviewers feel should be added to this 'long list' – each critic can add up to 10 recordings. The list is then divided into the 12 categories, some by period, some by genre, and specialist juries then reduce these individual lists to just six per category.

For Round 2, any critic can opt into as many, or as few, categories as he or she wants. Recordings are then circulated to each critic and the long

summer of listening begins – and, as I said, what an enjoyable summer it has been! The voting at the end of Round 2 gives us the dozen category winners – from these a Recording of the Year must be drawn. A meeting is convened comprising a dozen critics whose specialities are spread across the entire spectrum from early music to contemporary. Each critic is sent the winning recordings and we spend a morning weighing up the merits of the dozen contenders, arguing about their place in the catalogue, how to they compare with previous versions and so on. A vote is held and one of the dozen emerges as our Recording of the Year.

In addition to the two artist awards and the 12 category winners, we also honour a label and a great artist who we recognise for a lifetime's contribution to recorded classical music. This year we've chosen a truly magnificent singer and a wonderful human being...



We're delighted that Qobuz, the music streaming and download service, is sponsoring

our Recording of the Year. This is a prize which has honoured many of the most exciting and impressive musicians, and 2016 is no exception – an astounding recording by one of today's undisputed greats!



Sample the *Gramophone Classical Music Awards* on a special Amazon exclusive CD which celebrates the best of the best. Priced at £4.99, the disc features all the recording category winners as well as the Artist of the Year, Young Artist of the Year and our Lifetime Achievement winner,

RECORDING OF THE YEAR

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Instrumental

WINNER Bach. Beethoven. Rzewski Variations

'You have to keep reminding yourself that Levit doesn't turn 30 till next year – such is the confidence and maturity of his music-making'

This year's Awards featured a particularly stunning line-up of solo recordings, and the fact that neither Bertrand Chamayou's shimmering and subtly-lit Ravel nor

Yevgeny Sudbin's rampagingly exciting Scarlatti took the palm gives an idea of the level. Yet Igor Levit was the rightful winner. This is a release filled with audacity – some would argue the notion of putting Rzewski alongside the great variation sets of Bach and Beethoven is itself an act of great cheek. Not me though – I've loved *The People United* since Marc-André Hamelin's vibrant 1999 recording; 'never likely to be equalled' said the *Gramophone* review at the time, but now it has been. Levit is different but every bit as compelling, showing that great music can take manifold approaches.

You have to keep reminding yourself that Levit doesn't turn 30 till next year – such is the confidence and maturity of his music-making. His *Diabellis* are immensely thoughtful and thought-provoking. And if

Bach Goldberg Variations

Beethoven Diabelli

Variations

Rzewski The People United Will Never be Defeated!

Igor Levit pf

Sony Classical ® ③

88875 06096-2 (11/15)

Producer & Engineer

Andreas Neubronner

124 votes

he's less wildly anarchic in Var 22 than Andreas Staier or Piotr Anderszewski, that's not to suggest that his interpretation is at all buttoned-up: just sample Vars 17 and 19 for a taste of Levit's humour. And the more inward moments are special indeed, particularly the sequence of slow variations that lead to the final 33rd Variation.

Levit takes equally powerful ownership of the *Goldbergs*, generously spicing them with ornamentation yet never overpowering Bach's original. There's very much a sense that this is just a snapshot of how he conceives this piece; on another day, he'd do it differently. He can go from playful (the joyous Var 5 or the heady Var 14) to the delicate (subtly toying with Bach's rhythm in Var 13) in an instant. But the acid test is the effect of the returning Aria at the journey's end. Palpably, it is changed by the experience, as are the pianist and his listeners. And therein lies the power of this great musician.

Harriet Smith

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THE INTERVIEW

IGOR LEVIT ON BACH, BEETHOVEN AND RZEWINSKI



This album is basically the culmination of a concentration on the three most important composer-figures in my life so far: Bach, Beethoven and Frederic Rzewski. The variation has always been the musical form that is closest to me. It all started with smaller pieces, with the idea of the variation, of different kinds of characters, moods, how things change, how you basically express yourself.

I always thought of variations as kind of 'journey pieces': you start here and then you make a journey, and then you arrive. And whoever you were at the start, you're another person at the end. At least that's what I would like to believe. Of these three, the set which I performed first were the *Diabelli Variations*. And in the *Diabelli*, your experience as a performer and as a listener is like 'one song': you don't have these 30 incredible little pieces linked. You have a one-song piece – some are *attacca*, some not, but it's all the same piece. You make this 56-minute journey from the waltz, and then all of a sudden after the fugue there are four incredible bars – kind of 'senza time'. And you think, 'wait a second, where are we?', and suddenly you open your eyes and this whole craziness is over – the waltz becomes a minuet, it's an incredible moment.

I met Frederic for the first time after having listened to *The People United* on the Hamelin record on Hyperion. We really became friends – the fact that I met him, the fact that I know him has been one of the greatest things in my life so far, not only as a musician...absolutely not only as a musician. So I began to work on *The People United* – there also you make this incredible journey which begins with the march. You make a journey, you come back to the march, and you keep going. I'm not fighting for *The People United*. I think this man is one of the most significant composers of our time. I think this piece is one of the most significant pieces and, among variations, I think this piece is one of the three greatest. It doesn't need a champion; it seriously doesn't need a champion! It's just a masterpiece!

I could speak for hours and hours about the architecture of the *Goldbergs*, about the architecture of the *Diabellis*, of *The People*, about historical aspects, about certain performance aspects. About

the harpsichord – should you do it, or should you not do it? I can speak about that for ages. But my main aim as a musician is to bring music to the people. That is the task I have, and these three composers are the most important ones for me.

RUNNERS-UP



Ravel Complete Works for Solo Piano
Bertrand Chamayou *pf*

Erato ⑤ ② 2564 60268-1
(3/16) **122 votes**



D Scarlatti 18 Sonatas
Yevgeny Sudbin *pf*

BIS ⑤ ⑥ BIS2138 (4/16)
104 votes

PHOTOGRAPHY: JB MILLOT

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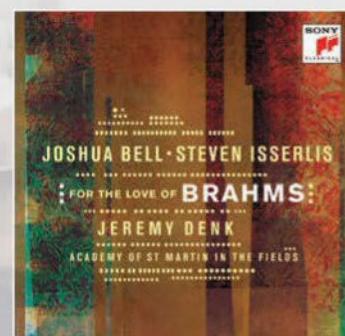
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Above as Brangäne in Wieland Wagner's 1962 production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* at Bayreuth

LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

WINNER Christa Ludwig

Mezzo-sopranos rarely make waves as sopranos or tenors do. It's not in their nature. 'I am a woman of the middle' Christa Ludwig once observed. 'What Eastern people call centred. Not extreme, either in my voice or my wishes, but happy with my lot.' And if that sounds a touch conservative don't be misled. As Ludwig's shrewd, gossipy, technically insightful and intellectually robust memoir *In My Own Voice* (Limelight Editions: 1999) vividly reveals, hers is a life in which the lamb has happily cohabited with the lion during nine remarkable decades.

None us can determine when we are born or what the fates have in store. When a fireball engulfed the small German town of Giessen in December 1944, the escaping Ludwig family must have wondered whether they were cursed or blessed. Yet the 16-year-old Christa was already blessed with a special talent. What's more, both parents were singers who had forged careers and made mistakes from which their daughter would learn.

Her mother Eugenie Besalla was a gifted mezzo with a strong soprano register. Unfortunately, in Aachen in the 1930s she was obliged to 'mix up

No mezzo has married beauty of voice and intelligence of portrayal quite as Ludwig has in a repertoire of over 80 roles'

her Leonores and her Sertas with her Ulricas and her Azucenas'. Thus she was denied what her daughter would later fashion: the bronzed beauty of a voice seamlessly joined across three registers.

Christa's Viennese-born father had sung alongside Caruso at the Met

but later turned to directing and the teaching of acting and public-speaking. Peerless diction and a first-hand knowledge of stagecraft would be other hallmarks of Christa's art, learned from her parents and from two great modernist directors in post-war Darmstadt, Harro Dicks and Gustav Rudolf Sellner.

In 1955, after a 24-year apprenticeship (Christa had begun warbling the Queen of the Night's aria at the age of three), the call came from Vienna and the world was suddenly her oyster. At the Vienna State Opera they gave her trouser-roles, which she disliked, and Mozart for which she thought herself ill-suited, a wonderful Dorabella notwithstanding. What interested her were not androgynous boys such as Cherubino, Octavian and Strauss's young Composer but mature women wrestling with life's dilemmas: Kundry and the Dyer's Wife, the Marschallin and Leonore.

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As a mezzo-soprano Ludwig never had the wider public profile of a Callas or a Vickers, though she sang with both and revered their gift for becoming the characters they played. In 1960 Walter Legge cast her as a youthfully impetuous Adalgisa to Callas's Norma; in 1962 he chose her to sing opposite Vickers in the famous Klemperer recording of *Fidelio*. She was Kundry to Vickers's Parsifal and Carmen to his Don José, for which she still bears the scar. (Vickers actually stabbed her in the final scene.)

And did the trinity of great conductors – Böhm, Karajan, Bernstein – with whom she famously worked leave similar scars, as tabloid journalism would have us believe? The very reverse. If we are moved to say of Christa Ludwig 'we shall not look upon her like again' it is in part because of the symbiotic yet at the same time independent-minded relations she enjoyed with these great theatre-conductors, with their deep understanding of the possibilities of the voice and their matchless knowledge of the operas they conducted. To discover the secrets of their individual cuisines, you must read Ludwig's book. Yet as colleagues they were complementary. Bernstein may have brought Ludwig to the Marschallin but to hear her Marschallin in all its glory it's to the unforgettable live 1969 Salzburg Festival performance conducted (and how!) by Böhm that we must turn.

Ludwig was a great Mahler singer even before the Mahler revival of the 1960s: witness her memorable 1958 recording of *Kindertotenlieder* with André Vandernoot. Yet it was Bernstein, she says, who later took her inside the music. He was also a rock in the early 1970s when the menopause played havoc with her all too vulnerable vocal chords. Karajan also kept faith, giving her, among other things, the chance to contribute a peerless Suzuki to a famous 1974 studio recording and film of *Madama Butterfly*.

Fricka and Waltraute (a treasured cameo) stayed with her to the end, joined by such charismatic oldies as Poulenc's Carmelite

Prioresse and Strauss's Klytemnestra. After seeing her Klytemnestra at the Met in 1984, Peter Conrad wrote, 'A three-volume biography of this woman was realised physically by Ludwig in the 25 minutes of life Strauss allows her'.

No mezzo-soprano has married beauty of voice and intelligence of portrayal quite as Christa Ludwig has done in a repertoire that has embraced over 80 roles. Once during a curtain-call, as the audience raved and cheered, Karajan murmured, 'If only they knew how good we really are'. Actually, I think we always knew how good Ludwig was. It was simply that there was never any need to shout it from the rooftops.

Richard Osborne

THE ESSENTIAL LUDWIG



Bellini
Norma (Adalgisa)

Tullio Serafin
Warner Classics B (3)
2564 63408-4 (11/61^R)



Beethoven Fidelio
(Leonore)

Otto Klemperer
Warner Classics B (2)
2564 69561-4 (6/62^R)



Wagner Lohengrin
(Ortrud)

Rudolf Kempe
Warner Classics B (3)
2564 69025-6 (2/64^R)



Mahler
Das Lied von der Erde

Otto Klemperer
Warner Classics B
2564 60759-8 (1/67^R)



Wagner Tristan und Isolde
(Brangäne)

Karl Böhm
DG M (3) 449 772-2
(1/67^R)

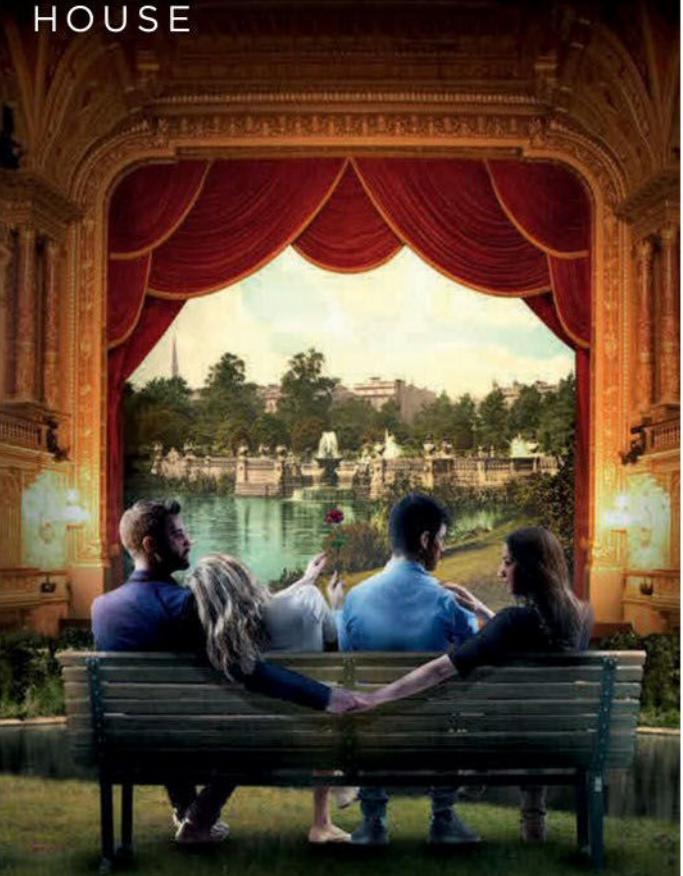


R Strauss Der Rosenkavalier
(Marschallin)

Karl Böhm
DG D 445 338-2
(11/94)



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ARTIST OF THE YEAR

WINNER **Daniil Trifonov**

No one could begrudge the choice by *Gramophone*'s readership of Daniil Trifonov as Artist of the Year. Wherever he has played people have been enthralled. It has been claimed that among pianists a talent such as his is a phenomenon that appears no more than two or three times in a generation, if that. In the five years since winning the Rubinstein and Tchaikovsky competitions Trifonov has made a successful career on terms that are his own and established himself everywhere as someone we shall always want to hear.

Talent, let it be remembered, is only the start of it; plenty of exceptional young pianists have that. There has to be vision and persistence as well, and the long view. Perhaps the astonishing thing about him in the years so far has been the ready achievement of an ideal balance of feeling and intellect that it takes most experienced players half a lifetime to reach. You sense the acuteness of his listening, which guides him towards a precise idea of the sounds he requires and their realization. As someone wisely said, the best kind of technique comes from knowing what you're doing. And a touch of humility never comes amiss, as if he were saying: 'the music's enough, actually – it's not about me'.

In piano competitions as in others, there are winners and losers and no doubt some sporting ambitions. I'm writing at the time of the Rio Olympics – but may we stand back for a moment and reflect that, at the top, we honour performers for their differences and individuality and ability to open up new realms of expression, not for their virtuoso prowess.

'He has established himself everywhere as someone we shall always want to hear'

RECOMMENDED RECORDING



**Rachmaninov 'Variations'
Daniil Trifonov pf
Philadelphia Orchestra /
Yannick Nézet-Séguin**
DG 479 4970GH (9/15)

The DG Rachmaninov 'Variations' recording is brilliantly supportive of this Award. Complementing the *Paganini Rhapsody* are the two solo sets of variations on themes by Chopin and Corelli and a suite of five pieces called *Rachmaniana* by Trifonov himself. Like his idol, he is a composer (from his earliest years) as well as a dazzling player. You could say that at age 25 he is still finding his voice, but composition studies are part of his life at the Cleveland Institute of Music, and watch out: his Piano

Concerto, premiered at the Verbier Festival at the end of July, is a big advance. I sense that Trifonov is not going to be the kind of pianist in the coming years who writes a bit of music now and then. Like all serious keyboard practitioners throughout history, one does both, even if your composing abilities turn out, for some, to be modest. At least they will remind you, as you sit down at the instrument, that without the composer you wouldn't be there.

I recall the three culminating evenings at his Wigmore Hall residency earlier this year, as many others will, and especially the recital with Matthias Goerne – performed without interval, starting with Berg and finishing with the Brahms *Four Serious Songs*, with Schumann, Wolf and Shostakovich along the way. The focus on the unity of words and music, of voice and piano, was unrelenting and extraordinary. It is not just Rachmaninov that Daniil does well! A final thought: whenever I've heard him I've had the impression he has unlocked the secret of leaving himself open, during the performance to find, and feel, something afresh. **Stephen Plaistow**

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FAZIOLI

Congratulations to Igor Levit, winner of the Gramophone Instrumental Award 2016



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LABEL OF THE YEAR

WINNER Warner Classics

'Alain Lanceron is one of the truly inspired A&R executives'

Warner Classics, the guardians since 2013 of both the EMI catalogue and its many labels as well as those of Teldec and Erato, has had a very impressive year. Of course it's no surprise to us at *Gramophone*, because the guiding light behind the label is its President, Alain Lanceron, one of the truly inspired A&R executives on the classical record scene today (and the recipient

not only of a *Gramophone* Award for Special Achievement in 2013 but also a welcome entrant to our Hall of Fame, voted for by our readers, the following year). Lanceron oversees both Erato (which has become the new home of both 'old' Erato and Virgin Classics) and Warner Classics, and has allowed each label to assume a different but complementary identity, and this year has seen each label flourishing.



Antonio Pappano makes his Gramophone Award-winning *Aida* recording with the Chorus and Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia (see page 38)



Vilde Frang's recording of the Korngold and Britten violin concertos with the Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra and James Gaffigan has won this year's Concerto Award (see page 35)



Alain Lanceron (left) with Kyung Wha Chung and EVP of A&R Jean-Philippe Rolland

Almost exactly a year ago, Warner Classics unveiled a rare studio recording of a core opera, Verdi's *Aida* conducted by Antonio Pappano who has been a key artist on the label and its predecessor, EMI, since 1997: it received almost universal adulation and this year adds our Opera Award to its list of accolades. And violinists, too, sit at the heart of what the label has been up to – violinists of the past (as personified by the magnificent Yehudi Menuhin centenary box) as well as violinists of the present (Vilde Frang's Award-winning coupling of violin concertos by Britten and Korngold and the revitalising of the recording career of the great Kyung Wha Chung whose solo Bach is reviewed this month).

Warner Classics and its predecessor EMI has always had a rich tradition of fine pianists and Dong Hyek Lim gave us (last November) a really magnificent, and fresh, new take on Chopin's Preludes. It was followed (in December) by the first disc from the newly signed Italian pianist Beatrice Rana (a former BBC New Generation Artist). Joined by Pappano and his Roman orchestra, she gave us Prokofiev's Second and Tchaikovsky's First Concertos.

Nurturing new artists, showing complete belief in them and giving them the devoted commitment they need to become tomorrow's greats; honouring recording's heritage with beautiful presentation and bringing it alive for a new generation; and continuing that golden tradition in our own day, with a no-expense-spared studio opera drawing on the talents of today's leading artists: these are three facets of Warner Classics that come together to make them a worthy winner of our 2016 Label of the Year Award.

Martin Cullingford & James Jolly

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"A fabulously filmed celebration of a genuinely special artist, focusing on its subject, not some "celebrity" presenter, and with plenty of music.

There is a certain poetic justice to the fact that Christopher Nupen, who captured the likes of Jacqueline du Pré and Daniel Barenboim on film in the 1960s, is still around to document the talent of Daniil Trifonov. This mesmerising documentary captures the poetic fire of the young Russian pianist, who talks about "boiling" himself in the music."

Jessica Duchen

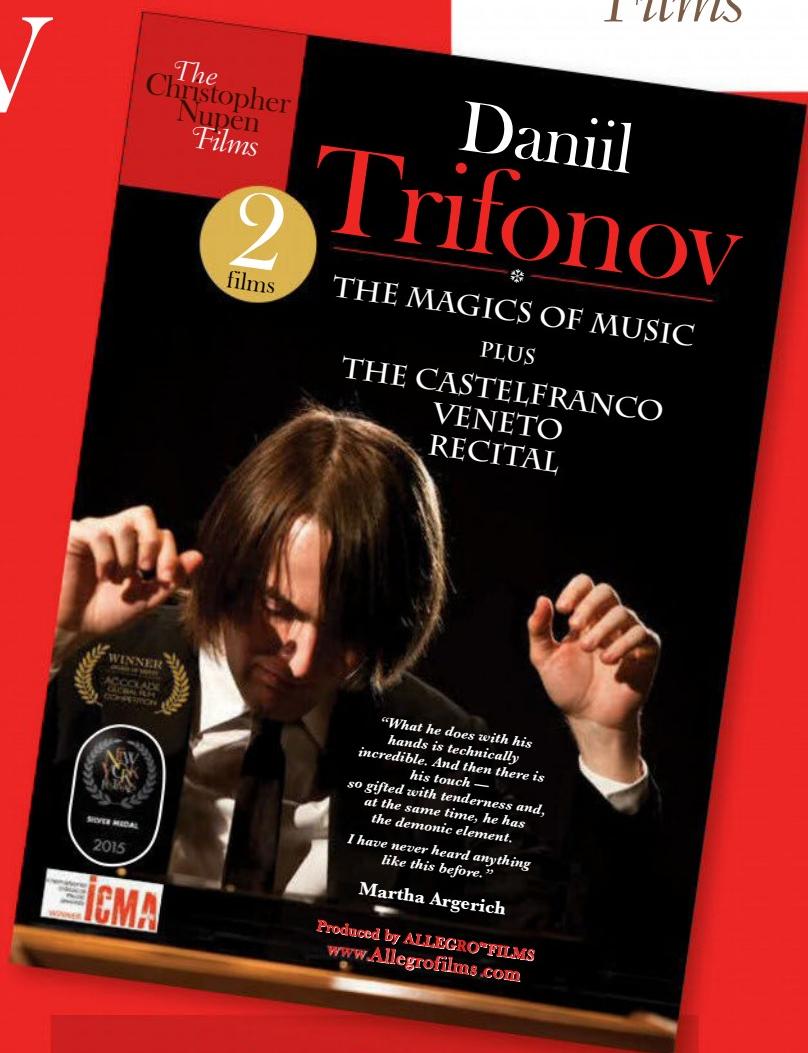
"Nupen is the David Attenborough of the musical Jungle. He feasts with the big beasts and is unafraid of snakes."

Norman Lebrecht

"The most gifted music documentarian of our age."

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YOUNG ARTIST OF THE YEAR

WINNER Benjamin Appl

'This young singer has huge potential and we look forward to following the exciting journey that lies ahead'

For the past few years, British music-lovers have been aware of a major new singing talent in their midst, Benjamin Appl. Listeners to BBC Radio 3 have had a particularly privileged ring-side seat as this young German baritone was a New Generation Artist for the class of 2014-16; but he's an increasingly visible figure on the concert scene, and once seen – tall, blond, handsome and with a commanding stage presence – he's not easily forgotten. The last private pupil of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau (there's a YouTube clip of the two baritones, nearly a half century apart in age, working on Lieder together), Appl has been named an ECHO Rising Star and, earlier this year, he signed a contract with Sony Classical, the first fruits of which will appear early next year.

Appl has appeared on a number of recordings, often alongside other singers – in the Mendelssohn song series with the pianist Malcolm Martineau for Champs Hill or in songs by Schumann alongside Ann Murray for Linn ('With clear, incisive diction, he characterises vividly in the narrative "Ballade des Harfners" and catches both the Lear-like weariness of soul and the accusatory bitterness of "Wer sich der Einsamkeit ergibt", wrote Richard Wigmore in March last year). But

RECOMMENDED RECORDING



Schubert Lieder
Benjamin Appl bar
Graham Johnson pf
Wigmore Hall Live M
WHLIVE0082 (7/16)

2016 saw the appearance of his first two solo recordings.

Champs Hill's May release, entitled 'Stunden, Tage, Ewigkeiten', linked Schumann's song-cycle *Dichterliebe* with other songs to words by Heine. As Richard Fairman wrote, 'Appl has a baritone voice with its own character and a natural appreciation of the essentials of singing Lieder'. Barely a month passed before his next disc, a Wigmore Hall Live recording – with Graham Johnson at the piano (Appl has worked with just about every major accompanist on the British scene) – of Lieder by Schubert. Hugo Shirley, who reviewed it, felt a marked advance even on that first disc: 'His instinctive feel for these songs is immediately striking and manifests itself in the sort of artlessness that distinguishes the finest Lieder singers: a lack of tension, an easy relationship with the poetry, a confidence in the words and Schubert's melodies to communicate with nothing but the gentlest helping interpretative hand.'

This young singer has huge potential and we look forward to following the exciting journey that lies ahead. As Richard Fairman concluded, in his May review: 'Sample his debut solo disc and you will hear the current front-runner in the next generation of Lieder singers.'

James Jolly

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The Proms, the BBC performance groups and partnerships with artists: just some of the many ways that BBC Radio 3 has enriched the country's cultural life for 70 years

SPECIAL ACHIEVEMENT

WINNER BBC Radio 3

The BBC's Third Programme began broadcasting (evenings only!) on September 29, 1946 – so a 70th birthday looms.

In September 1967, it was renamed Radio 3 when the Corporation re-branded its radio channels and, since then, it has become an integral part of the nation's cultural life (and widely followed, and envied, internationally). We're making this award – while acknowledging and rewarding the network's 24-hour, seven-day-a-week contribution to our daily routine – for Radio 3's extraordinary role in the musical fabric of this country.

No other organisation, anywhere in the world, has delivered so wholeheartedly the BBC's first Director General Lord Reith's three-word challenge; 'to inform, educate and entertain' (goals still enshrined in the Corporation's current mission statement and which have been influential on broadcasters throughout the world, America's PBS among them). But Radio 3 went a lot further: in its 70 years it has commissioned thousands of pieces of classical music and given them their first performances and broadcasts; it has supported many generations of young artists (notably in the past 17

In its 70 years, BBC Radio 3 has become an integral part of the nation's cultural life

years through its New Generation Artists scheme) and, through its performing groups (the BBC SO, the BBC Concert Orchestra, the BBC National Orchestra of Wales, the BBC Philharmonic and BBC

Scottish SO, the BBC Singers and, partly funded by the BBC, the Ulster Orchestra), has been an integral part of the foundation of the whole nation's musical life.

Looking back through the list of *Gramophone* Award winners sees plentiful representation of those orchestras funded and administered by the station: Luciano Berio and the BBC SO (1977), Boulez and the BBC SO (1983–4), Andrew Davis conducting Tippett's *The Mask of Time* (1987), a historic recording of Webern conducting the BBC SO in Berg (1991), Nikolai Demidenko playing Medtner piano concertos with the BBC Scottish SO (1992), Jerzy Maksymiuk conducting the BBC Scottish SO in MacMillan (1993), Tortelier conducting Dutilleux with the BBC Phil (1994), Knussen conducting the BBC SO in Robin Holloway (1994), Tortelier conducting the BBC Phil in Boulanger (2000), Knussen conducting the BBC SO in

Elliott Carter (2000), Bax symphonies from Vernon Handley and the BBC Phil (2004), Stanford orchestral songs from the BBC NOW and Richard Hickox (2006), Knussen and the BBC SO in music by Julian Anderson (2007), Jiří Bělohlávek conducting the BBC SO in Janáček (2008), Ilan Volkov and the BBC Scottish SO in music by Jonathan Harvey (2008) and by Britten (2009), Tortelier conducting the BBC SO in French *concertante* piano works (2011), Bělohlávek and the BBC SO in Martinů symphonies (2012) and Suk orchestral works (2013), Prokofiev piano concertos with the BBC Phil (2014) and, last year, Elgar's *The Dream of Gerontius* with the BBC SO conducted by Sir Andrew Davis.

So many artists received their first musical exposure thanks to the BBC: Peter Pears and Sarah Connolly were both members of the BBC Singers; Janet Baker, just a few weeks after joining the Ambrosian Singers, was granted a BBC Northern Home Service recital of songs by Brahms and Elgar, to name but three of the (subsequently) most high-profile. The New Generation Artist scheme, launched in 1999, has fed an extraordinary number of musicians into our world – the *Gramophone* Awards have recognised the talents of Steven Osborne, Paul Lewis, the Belcea Quartet, Alexander Melnikov, Jonathan Lemalu, Simon Trpčeski, Alison Balsom, the Quatuor Ebène, the Pavel Haas Quartet (five times!), Mahan Esfahani, Benjamin Grosvenor, Igor Levit and Benjamin Appl. The last two of those are among this year's winners.

It is impossible to gauge how much music the BBC has commissioned or premiered but, speeding past the British premiere of Berg's *Wozzeck* (1934) or world premiere of Vaughan Williams's Symphony No 4 (1935), the list of commissions is astounding. From Elgar's (undelivered) Third Symphony (commissioned in 1932), the list contains Walton's *Crown Imperial* (1937) and *Troilus and Cressida* (1954), Poulenc's Sinfonietta (1948), Bliss's Violin Concerto (1955), Tippett's Second Symphony (1958), *Vision of St Augustine* (1966) and *New Year* (1990), Lennox Berkeley's Second Symphony (1959), Arnold's Fourth Symphony (1960), Britten's *Owen Wingrave* (1971), Boulez's *Rituel* (1975), Schnittke's Second Symphony (1980), Giles Swain's *Cry* (1980), Birtwistle's *Earth Dances* (1986), Maw's *Odyssey* (1987), Elliott Carter's *Anniversary* (1989), Holmboe's Symphony No 12 (1989), Turnage's *Your Rockaby* (1994), and two works by John Tavener that might perhaps be described as modern repertoire pieces: *The Protecting Veil* (1989) and *Song for Athene* (1994). The list is endless. This year's Proms season alone witnessed new commissions from Anthony Payne, Michael Berkley, Lera Auerbach, Helen Grime, Malcolm Hayes, Huw Watkins, Charlotte Bray, Mica Levi, David Sawer, Piers Hellawell, Emily Howard, Sally Beamish, Bayan Northcott, Julian Anderson and Tom Harrold.

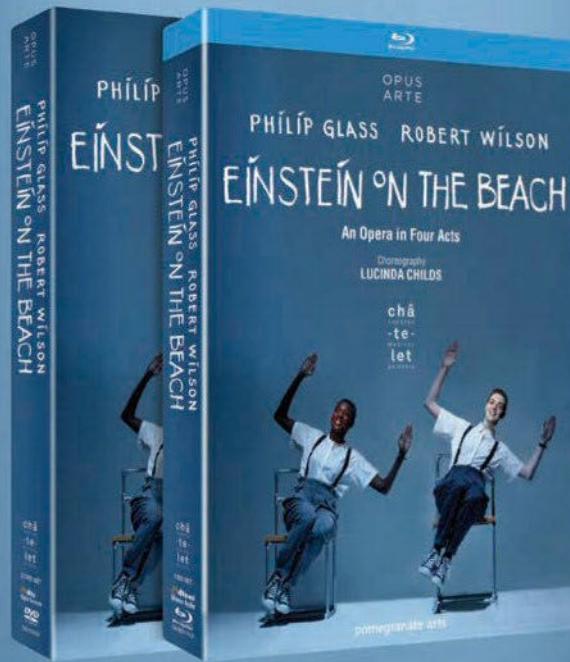
Of course, we can't ignore the hours of live music-making – concerts and operas beamed from venues up and down the country, as well as from opera-houses and festivals around the world, not to mention what is simply the world's greatest music festival, the BBC Proms. Nor the magazine programme *Music Matters* (and for those of us with longer memories, the wonderfully urbane Michael Oliver's *Music Weekly*). *Gramophone* and Radio 3 come closest on a Saturday morning – not only sharing many contributors, but both exploring the wonders of the recorded catalogue. *Building a Library* is, quite simply, an institution. Then there's Choral Evensong, the lunchtime concerts (once from St John's Smith Square and St George's, Brandon Hill, Bristol and now from London's Wigmore Hall). And that constantly fascinating weekly series, Donald Macleod's *Composer of the Week*.

So, as the 70 candles are lined up on the Radio 3 birthday cake (and the recent, raised, RAJAR figures showed the station in fine fettle), we stop to say congratulations, and thanks, and here's to sustaining your extraordinary part in our musical life for another 70!

James Jolly & Martin Cullingford

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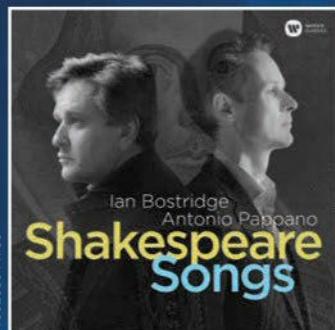
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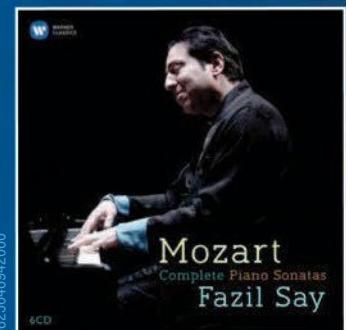
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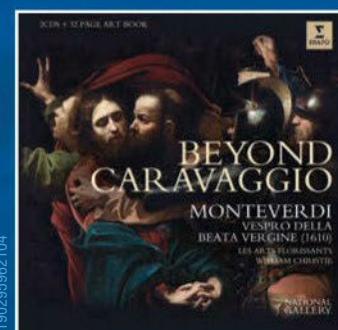
This release sees the Turkish pianist return to Warner Classics with the complete Mozart Piano Sonatas, grouped on each disc by key, revealing Mozart's unique approach to tonality



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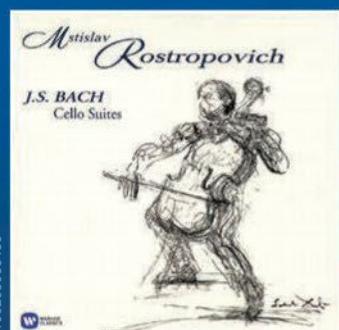
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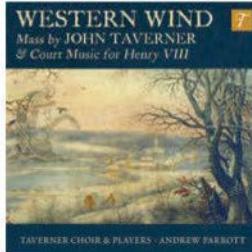
WINNER ‘Western Wind’

‘Parrott’s relationship with this repertoire is a long and intimate one’

Barely 20 bars in length, who could have guessed that the 16th-century popular song ‘Western wynde, when wilt thou blow’ would yield such a musical legacy? Certainly not its anonymous author. Borrowed as the theme of Mass settings by Taverner, Tye and Sheppard, the verse even reappeared in the 20th century as the basis for a movement of Stravinsky’s Cantata. It’s this song that forms the keystone of this superb and wide-ranging recording by Andrew Parrott and his Taverner Choir & Players – less a recording of a Mass than a portrait of a period.

As the first secular song to be adapted in England for sacred use, ‘Western wynde’ is a touchstone of its age, a musical portal Parrott uses thoughtfully to explore not just the liturgical polyphony and plainchant but also the courtly songs, dances and keyboard music of Taverner and his contemporaries, including William Cornysh the Younger and Henry VIII himself. Some of these works are interpolated between the Mass movements, a decision purists may find contentious but which makes for a much more satisfying listening experience, shaking the ear up with shifting textures and setting sacred against secular in satisfying friction.

Andrew Parrott’s relationship with this repertoire is a long and intimate one, and his young vocal forces blend this experience and sense of long-form musical architecture with a freshness of tone that favours a forthright directness in *tutti* sections



‘Western Wind’

Mass by John Taverner & Court Music for Henry VIII

Emily Van Evera sop

Charles Daniels ten

Taverner Choir & Players /

Andrew Parrott

Avie (F) AV2352 (5/16)

Producer & Engineer

Adrian Hunter

107 votes

– a more muscular Christianity than either The Tallis Scholars or The Sixteen find in their more otherworldly treatments. Verse sections do offer a more fluid, horizontal emphasis, and the freshness of these solo voices offers an effective contrast to songs performed by Emily Van Evera and Charles Daniels (‘Yow and I and Amyas’, ‘Wher be ye my love?’), where colours and emotions are more richly shaded.

Instrumental numbers, including Hugh Aston’s ‘A Horneypipe’ and Cornysh’s ‘Fa la sol’, are no afterthought, but a central part of this unusual disc’s appeal, with Steven Devine’s harpsichord contributions a particular highlight.

This is a recording that speaks beyond the specialist Early Music echo-chamber, offering a vivid and fascinating musical distillation of one of England’s richest cultural eras.

Alexandra Coghlan

RUNNERS-UP



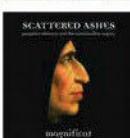
Arnold & Hugo de Lantins

Secular works

Le Miroir de Musique /

Baptiste Romain vielle, bagpipes

Ricercar (F) RIC365 (4/16) **97 votes**



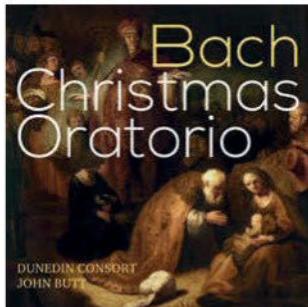
‘Scattered Ashes’

Magnificat / Philip Cave

Linn (B) (2) CKCD517 (3/16)

83 votes

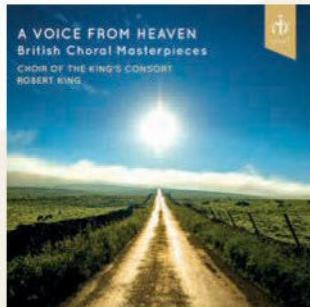
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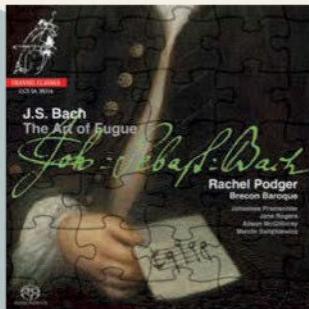
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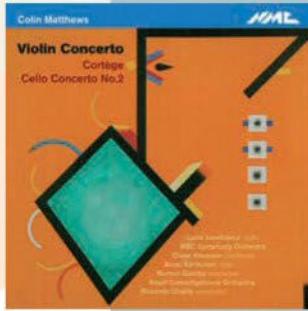
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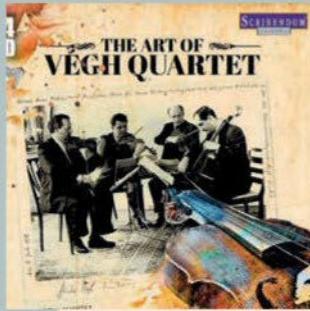
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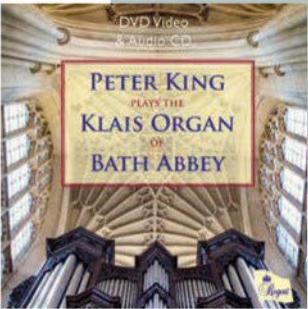
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BAROQUE INSTRUMENTAL

WINNER **Biber Rosary Sonatas**

'Podger displays a level of detail that surpasses even her own usual refinements'

Rachel Podger's recordings are invariably, and rightly, well-received – she took this same Award back in 2003 for her Vivaldi *La stravaganza* – but, even so, her reading of Biber's *Rosary Sonatas* displays a level of detail and layers of subtlety that surpass even her own usual refinements. She may have recorded Bach's violin sonatas and partitas, one of the pinnacles of solo violin repertoire, over 20 years ago, but to wait to record the Biber that influenced them was a sensible decision that has yielded a performance of such variety, insight and instinctive musicianship as to seal her unique talents as a performer.

The *scordatura* – re-tuning of certain strings on the violin to create different and challenging harmonies – that is a particular characteristic of these pieces is only one element of the array of techniques Podger has mastered here: the transformation of sound between the 'Crucifixion' and 'Resurrection' sonatas, for instance, makes it difficult to believe she is playing the same instrument. That comes as much from the beauty of her playing, though (and that of the radiantly contrasting continuo parts), as from the leg-up Biber gives the performer with the different



Biber Rosary Sonatas
Rachel Podger vn
David Miller archlute
Marcin Świątkiewicz hpd,
org
Jonathan Manson vc,
va da gamba
Channel Classics F ②
CCSSA37315 (10/15)
Producer **Jonathan**
Freeman-Attwood
Engineer **Jared Sacks**
132 votes

colours naturally provided by the *scordatura*. And this detail, of course, comes within the broader context of Podger's full engagement with the collection's profoundly spiritual narrative and what sounds like effortless playing of some of the most technically challenging music in the string repertoire.

In the end, if this disc shows anything it is that, however established they may be, the greatest performers are those that still have the power to surprise and gladden, whatever you previously thought you knew of them.

Caroline Gill

RUNNERS-UP

- | | |
|--|--|
| | JS Bach Organ works
Masaaki Suzuki org
BIS F BIS2111 (10/15)
107 votes |
| | Lawes The Royal Consorts
Phantasm
Linn F ② CKD470 (6/15)
105 votes |



BAROQUE VOCAL

WINNER Monteverdi Madrigali, Vol 1, 'Cremona'

'Such intimacy allows for worlds of nuance to hang on the smallest of gestures'

As lovers bare their souls in this splendid selection of madrigals from Monteverdi's first three books, so the singers are also starkly exposed. This album, live and intimate, is one of the most closely recorded discs of its kind. More modest than the emotional quick-fire performances of, say, La Venexiana or Concerto Italiano, the close-up world of Les Arts Florissants is what TV acting is to stage acting.

Such extreme intimacy allows for whole worlds of nuance to hang on the smallest of gestures: a slight quavering on a long note, or a snatched breath. For the listener this album is as close to sitting in the middle of the performance as it is possible to imagine. Interpretatively, it pays homage to The Consort of Musicke's performances from the 1980s by lending a greater sense of personal profundity to the words and suggesting an affinity with earlier madrigalists such as Marenzio.

Once one overcomes the disappointment that performances so fine are not part of a complete madrigal cycle it becomes possible to realise what a wonderful selection this album offers. These three books, so rich in artifice are, dare I say it, more immediately forthcoming in this mini-cycle version. Listeners will sit in wonderment as they try to comprehend how so young a composer could have



Monteverdi Madrigali,
Vol 1, 'Cremona'

Les Arts Florissants/

Paul Agnew

Les Arts Florissants

Ⓐ AFO05 (7/15)

Producers

Alain Duchemin &

Raffi Kevorkian

Engineers

Christian Lahondes &

Dimitri Scapolan

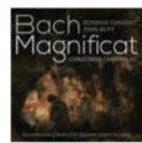
97 votes

represented the nuances of love both granted and unrequited, as well as the layers of sheer knowing with which these singers now perform his works.

Les Arts Florissants sing with exquisite clarity, creating excitement from exactitude rather than sheer velocity. Here, Tasso's mischievous 'S'andasse Amor à caccia' is extraordinarily nimble but almost immediately quashed by the impertinence of 'Se tu mi lassi, perfida, tuo danno' – from love-goes-a-hunting to love-gets-a-slap within the space of four spellbinding minutes. Yet rather than projecting these works outwards, these singers draw listeners in, an invitation to eavesdrop on the innermost thoughts of the librettists. The whole disc is exquisite.

Edward Breen

RUNNERS-UP



Bach Magnificat. Christmas Cantata
Soloists; Dunedin Consort / John Butt

Linn Ⓜ CKCD469 (12/15)

90 votes



'Le Concert Royal de la Nuit'
Ensemble Correspondances /
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Harmonia Mundi Ⓜ HMC95 2223/4 (11/15)

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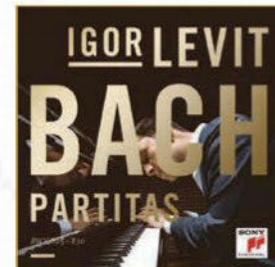


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CHAMBER

WINNER Tippett String Quartets

'The brilliant Heath Quartet offer playing of remarkable intensity and control'

Peter Quantrill greeted this cycle in March as 'a tremendous achievement'. It assuredly is that, but it is also so much more: for this is the Heath Quartet's debut recording, in music of daunting technical and interpretative challenges, and was taken (largely) live from concerts given at London's Wigmore Hall over a period of five months from 2013 to 2014.

Sir Michael Tippett's star hasn't waned since his death in the way that so many other composers' has. Quite apart from the evergreen *A Child of Our Time*, there continue to be doughty champions of the symphonies (not least from BBC quarters), the piano works have been taken up by artists such as Steven Osborne and (in the case of the Concerto) even Lang Lang, and a performance tradition has been growing around the first four operas, raising hopes that the time is nigh for *New Year*. Now a group whose star is very much on the rise has provided a quartet cycle for the next generation, with playing of remarkable intensity and control.

It was the Lindsays who set the standard in this music in 1975, recording the first three quartets (written in the 1930s and 1940s) and having Nos 4



Tippett String Quartets
Heath Quartet (Oliver Heath, Cerys Jones vns Gary Pomeroy va Christopher Murray vc) Wigmore Hall Live (B) (2) WHLIVE0080/2 (3/16)
Producer **Jeremy Hayes**
Engineer **Steve Portnoi**
157 votes

and 5 composed in gratitude especially for them. Now, it seems, the time is right for a reassessment of this music; and, with the two later quartets (works of the 1970s and 1990s) having 'bedded in' to the consciousness, the feeling in these performances is of consummate mastery as much as of intrepid pioneering. The sense of continuity – of a cycle unfolding – is more keenly divined than with the Tippett Quartet on Naxos, and the glowing acoustic of arguably London's finest chamber venue becomes a character in itself on the recording, every bit as much as the composer and the brilliant musicians of the Heath Quartet.

David Thrasher

RUNNERS-UP

- Berg** Lyric Suite **Wellesz** Sonnets for Elizabeth Barrett Browning **Zeisl** Komm, süßer Tod
Renée Fleming sop **Emerson Quartet** Decca (F) 478 8399DH (10/15) **129 votes**
Brahms String Quartets Nos 1 & 3 **Artemis Quartet** Erato (F) 2564 61266-3 (10/15) **118 votes**

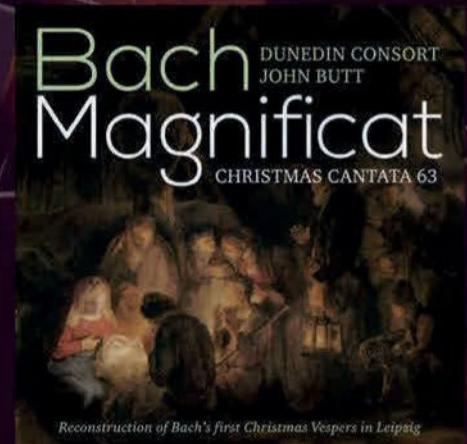
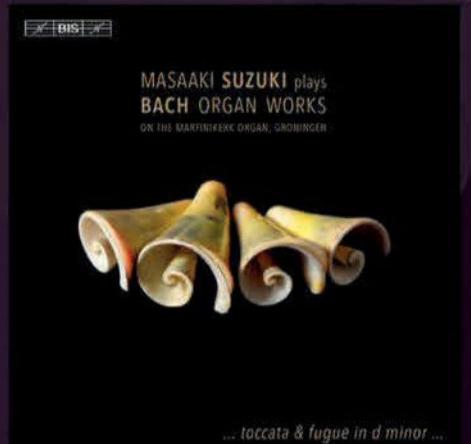
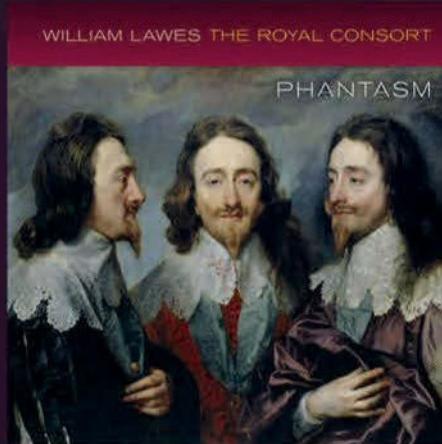
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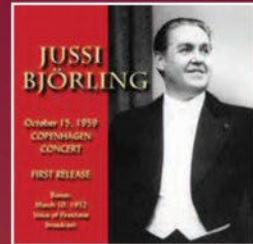
Heath Quartet – Tippett: String Quartets Nos. 1 – 5
Short List –
Best Chamber Recording
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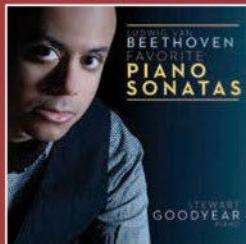
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Short List –
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– Gramophone Awards 2016



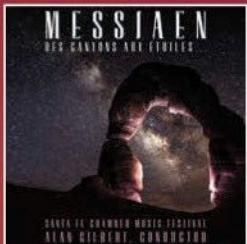
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CONCERTO

WINNER **Britten. Korngold** Violin Concertos

'Fresh thought illuminates each phrase'

Even if they are familiar with both concertos, most listeners will come to this recording with a distinct preference for one or the other. One of Vilde Frang's achievements is to make an impassioned case for considering them side by side and finding that in their different idioms, each stands up to the other.

Like two children from the same family, quite contrasted in appearance – Britten's concerto wilful and truculent, Korngold's more playful and extrovert – they share not only close chronology (the troubled years of 1936–7) but a common parentage, in Alban Berg. His late work bequeathed to them the backstory of an angelic elegy and a share in the lineage of the Austro-German violin concerto.

The pale touch of pure tone in the opening of the Korngold hints at a more withdrawn and capricious nature than the easy-going cinematic hero with which (mostly male) violinists of the last 30 years have seduced the microphone. Frang has a winning way with the *rubato* that makes the melodies yearn and smile, but there's a fragile thread of silver woven through her passagework that bounces off the glinting accompaniment of the Frankfurt RSO as an opalescent gown catches the light in a mirrored ballroom.

An instrumental transformation of *Wozzeck* can be heard in the central *Romanze*, with its shimmering pools of celesta and suspended strings, the dark undertow of bass and Frang's vulnerable solo line. Fresh thought illuminates each phrase, and she has



Britten. Korngold

Violin Concertos

Vilde Frang vn

Frankfurt Radio

Symphony Orchestra / James Gaffigan

Warner Classics

£ 2564 60092-1 (2/16)

Producer **Udo Wüstendörfer**

Co-producer **Jørn Pedersen**

Engineer **Robin Bös**

151 votes

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the technique to bring off every idea, from the wild caprice of the first movement's dash to the double-bar, to a coquettish (or demure?) restraint in the finale's big tune.

The sense of a partnership is important in a concerto, and the Frankfurt RSO became an intensely attentive ensemble under its previous Music Director, Paavo Järvi. I like the sinewy response of the basses to Frang's hunted flight through the *scherzo* of the Britten. She and James Gaffigan chart a dignified but not too solemn course through the final Passacaglia, which is launched here by a magnificently surly solo trombone. On a technical level, the security of her high register outshines most rivals on disc, but it's the strength of personality – hers, and the composers' in reflection – which makes this a deserved Award-winner.

Peter Quantrill

RUNNERS-UP



Beethoven Piano Concerto No 3

Maria João Pires pf **Orchestra of the 18th Century / Frans Brüggen**

NIFC £ DVD NIFCDVD005 (7/15)

141 votes



Rachmaninov 'Variations'

Daniil Trifonov pf **Philadelphia Orchestra / Yannick Nézet-Séguin**

DG £ 479 4970GH (9/15)

136 votes

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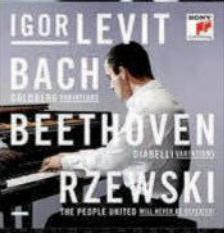
James Gaffigan
CONDUCTOR
CONCERTO

Sir Antonio Pappano
CONDUCTOR
OPERA

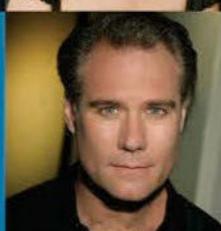
Ekaterina Semenchuk
MEZZO-SOPRANO
OPERA

Igor Levit
PIANO
INSTRUMENTAL

Benjamin Appl
BARITONE
YOUNG ARTIST
OF THE YEAR



Brandon Jovanovich
TENOR
CHORAL



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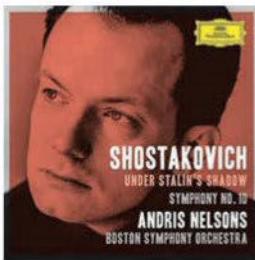
ORCHESTRAL

WINNER Shostakovich Symphony No 10

'Nelsons's conception of the mighty Tenth Symphony is hugely compelling'

Andris Nelsons's first commercial venture with the Boston Symphony – a Sibelius Second Symphony of unstinting ardour, keen temperament and inspiring eloquence released on the orchestra's in-house label (6/15) – promised great things. This initial instalment in a projected Shostakovich symphony cycle for Deutsche Grammophon hits even greater heights.

Prefaced by a devastatingly intense rendering of the hair-raising Act 2 Passacaglia from *Lady Macbeth of the Mtsensk District*, Nelsons's conception of the mighty Tenth Symphony is hugely compelling in its iron control, intrepid character, scrupulous preparation, rhythmic acuity and shrewd observation. His way with the towering first movement may be daringly spacious but his rapt identification with this music and mastery of the bigger scheme are never in doubt. Bass lines stalk with reassuring solidity and purpose – and what a powerfully immersive sense of mystery and wonder those exemplary Boston strings distil from fig 66 (22'35"), and then into the coda with its ghostly writing for two piccolos. Brace yourselves next for the terrifying *Scherzo*, which shoots off like a rocket and can boast some astonishingly articulate orchestral playing to boot. Nelsons also plots an uncommonly adroit course through the ensuing, piercingly autobiographical



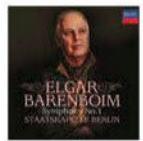
Shostakovich Symphony No 10
Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons
DG ④ 479 5059GH (8/15)
Producer & Engineer
Shawn Murphy
Engineers **Nick Squire**,
John Morin
172 votes

Allegretto: that sublimely inevitable return of the symphony's introductory material after the sardonic opening pages is handled with especial perception, while the shattering central climax once again finds the BSO operating at maximum throttle. The finale, too, is marvellous, its slumberingly intense prologue leading to a main *Allegro* which is simply thrilling in its edge-of-seat thrust and giddily triumphant impact.

So, a wholly absorbing Shostakovich Tenth worthy to stand alongside such legendary predecessors on the Yellow Label as the 1955 Ančerl and 1966 Karajan. Need I remind you that Nelsons and his fired-up Bostonians have since gone on to give us a superlative Fifth (8/16)?

Andrew Achenbach

RUNNERS-UP



Elgar Symphony No 1
Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim
Decca ④ 478 9353DH (5/16)

163 votes



Dutilleux Symphony No 2. *Métaboles*, etc
Augustin Hadelich vn Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot
Seattle Symphony Media ④ SSM1007 (10/15) **160 votes**

OPERA

WINNER Verdi Aida

'Grand opera doesn't get grander than this'

Verdi's *Aida* is 'the most classically concise of the great 19th-century grand operas yet it remains the one most closely associated with theatrical excess. To savour its qualities, it should be heard first, seen later, which is why the gramophone has played so important a role in its performing history.' Richard Osborne launched his review of this remarkable set in appropriately 'grand' terms, going on to underline the fact that what he was celebrating was as far as you could get from a 'cheap-to-record' concert performance; among the principals, only the Amneris had sung the role on stage.

There have been plenty of staged performances of Verdi's offering for the opening of the Cairo Opera House in 1871 – more tentative, less genuinely dramatic than this one – and some of them have been heard and seen or disc. It was surely a risk to transplant the definitive Lohengrin and Elsa of our time to roles so memorably recorded by Italians or Italian opera specialists – not least Maria Callas. But what makes the Jonas Kaufmann/Anja Harteros team outstanding is the extraordinary blend of vocal distinctiveness and idiomatic flair with which they ensure that you quickly forget the competition and revel in their sheer accomplishment.



Verdi Aida
Anja Harteros sop Aida;
Jonas Kaufmann ten
Radames; Ekaterina
Semenchuk mez Amneris
Chorus and Orchestra of
the Accademia Nazionale
di Santa Cecilia /
Sir Antonio Pappano
Warner Classics Ⓛ ③
2564 610663 (A/15)
Producer Stephen Johns
Engineer Jonathan Allen
107 votes

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Mrs Joan Jones

While characterisation is full-blooded, melodramatic posturing is kept at bay, thanks to the clear-headed spontaneity of Sir Antonio Pappano's conducting. RO confessed to some nostalgia for John Culshaw's 'contrived but subtly layered acoustic picture' in the 1959 Decca release. But with orchestral playing and choral singing of such stylishness, in a recording that uses all the advantages of modern technology to enable the principal singers to do their excellent best and the work to come up even more powerfully than usual, this is indeed an album deserving to win prizes. Despite *Aida*'s poignantly quiet ending, grand opera doesn't get grander than this.

Arnold Whittall

RUNNERS-UP



Zandonai Francesca da Rimini
Soloists; Freiburg Philharmonic
Orchestra / Fabrice Bollon
CPO Ⓛ ② CPO 777 960-2 (1/16)
100 votes



Tchaikovsky The Queen of Spades
Soloists; Bavarian Radio Symphony
Orchestra / Mariss Jansons
BR-Klassik Ⓛ ③ 900129 (A/15)
99 votes



PHOTOGRAPHY: MUSACCIO & SICILIA



CHORAL

WINNER Schoenberg *Gurrelieder*

'The choral singing is outstanding – rich in tone and beautifully focused'

Reviewing Markus Stenz's *Gurrelieder* on its release, Hugo Shirley admired its 'fierce conviction and integrity', as well as describing it as a 'formidable' achievement technically. Made in the Cologne Philharmonie, and superbly engineered by Christian Feldgen, it represents state-of-the-art sound at its best – breathtaking in its clarity and detail, yet always seeming natural and unforced over an extreme dynamic range. Some, HS included, have expressed reservations about the backward placing of the multiple choirs, though this is, I think, integral to a recording in which sound and interpretation are carefully aligned.

Like his engineers, Stenz strives for detailed clarity, both orchestral and choral. The Gürzenich Orchestra's playing has great immediacy throughout, and the sensual textures that envelope Schoenberg's lovers at the start are wonderfully seductive. As the idyll turns into a metaphysical nightmare, the thematic fragmentation and stark, at times desiccated orchestration take on an almost hallucinatory vividness. Stenz blends intelligence with great passion and a refusal to countenance coarseness of effect. The choral placings ensure we hear far more of the orchestra in the night-ride than we usually do, and the passage's force derives from



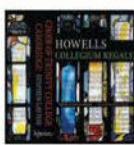
Schoenberg *Gurrelieder*
Soloists; choirs; Cologne
Gürzenich Orchestra /
Markus Stenz
Hyperion (F) ②
CDA68081/2 (8/15)
Producer Jens Schünemann
Engineer Christian Feldgen
148 votes

its ferocious energy and momentum rather than its decibel count alone.

The choral singing is outstanding – rich in tone and beautifully focused; nowhere more so, perhaps, than at 'Der Hahn erhebt den Kopf zur Kraht', where the dynamic shading over a narrow, quiet range is at once immaculate and harrowing in its impact. The soloists are strong, with Brandon Jovanovich's virile yet reckless Waldemar and Claudia Mahnke's passionate Wood Dove among the finest in disc, though Barbara Haveman's Tove is no match in either lustre or subtlety for Inge Borkh on Rafael Kubelík's otherwise variably sung 1965 DG set. Over all, though, it's a major achievement and a more than worthy winner.

Tim Ashley

RUNNERS-UP



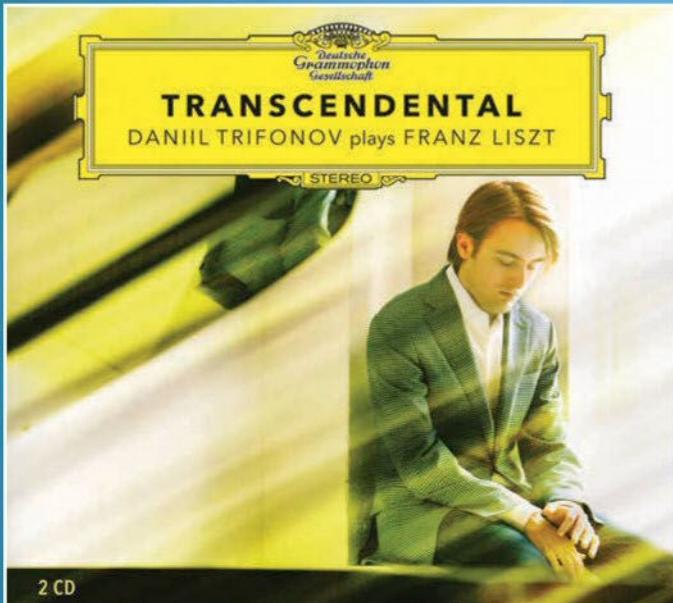
Howells Collegium Regale
Choir of Trinity College, Cambridge /
Stephen Layton with Eleanor Kornas,
Owain Park org
Hyperion (F) CDA68105 (4/16) **134 votes**



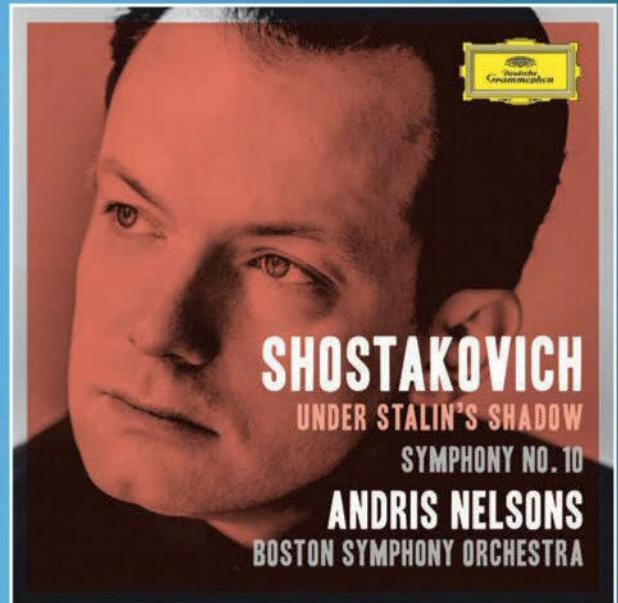
Bliss Morning Heroes. Hymn to Apollo
BBC Symphony Chorus & Orchestra /
Sir Andrew Davis
Chandos (F) CHSA5159 (11/15)
132 votes



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ARTIST
OF
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RECORDING
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THE YEAR



RECITAL

WINNER Mozart 'The Weber Sisters'

'Devieilhe is like a modern-day equivalent of the Weber sisters rolled into one'

When Mozart first encountered the Weber sisters he wrote to his father: 'I have become so fond of this unfortunate family that my dearest wish is to make them happy'. He was to be inspired by them and infatuated. They would provide him trusted interpreters as singers and his future extended family and wife. No wonder that the first meeting made such an impact.

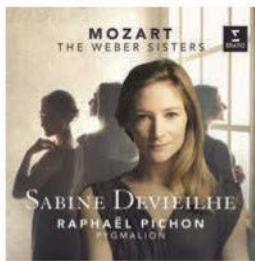
What an extraordinary range of music he composed for them. The programme for this highly entertaining Erato disc embraces so much – storming showpieces and slight ditties, arias sacred and operatic, at one moment firing off stratospheric vocal pyrotechnics, at the next confiding tender caresses. For Aloysia he wrote not only the hair-raising *Popoli di Tessaglia* with its high G up in the leger lines, but also the melting *Nebmt meinen Dank*. For Josepha, the first Queen of the Night, there was 'Der Hölle Rache'; for Constanze, his wife, the sublime 'Et incarnatus est' from the C minor Mass as well as an everyday singing exercise.

Of course, none of it would be half as enjoyable if the performances were not so completely persuasive. Sabine Devieilhe is like a modern-day equivalent of all the Weber sisters rolled into one. Her versatile

soprano is at once flexible and lyrical, agile and lofty in its reach, light of touch but with some depth in its sweetness of tone. There is nothing here not to like, and that includes the lively and sensitive playing of Pygmalion under Raphaël Pichon.

It is a disc you will want to play at musical soirées – not least for its jaw-dropping displays of vocal virtuosity. And, if the assembled company is broad-minded, let it run on to the mystery track after the long silence at the end. Now that this disc has won a *Gramophone* Award, hopefully even more people will have their ribs tickled when they find out what it is.

Richard Fairman



Mozart 'The Weber Sisters'

Sabine Devieilhe sop

Pygmalion /

Raphaël Pichon

Producer Daniel Zalay

Engineer Hugues

Deschaux

Erato Ⓛ 2564 60758-4
(11/15)

76 votes

RUNNERS-UP



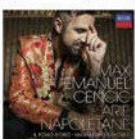
'Scene!'

Christiane Karg sop

Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Berlin Classics Ⓛ 0300646BC (7/15)

65 votes



'Arie napoletane'

Max Emanuel Cencic counterten

Il Pomo d'Oro / Maxim Emelyanychev

Decca Ⓛ 478 8422DH (12/15)

64 votes



SOLO VOCAL

WINNER ‘Néère’ Mélodies by Chausson, Duparc, Hahn et al

‘This recital is exponentially better than even the best French recitals out there’

The outward reasons for this disc's top votes amid so many distinguished contenders might not be immediately apparent. Most music here is readily found elsewhere. Nowhere can you say that these gracious Hahn, Chausson and Duparc songs about lilacs and butterflies are ‘problem repertoire’ (as in Werner Güra’s Beethoven song recital on Harmonia Mundi that was a runner up in this category). And Véronique Gens is no stranger to us, having delivered solid, distinguished recordings over the past 20 years. What makes this recital particularly irresistible is that every element is exponentially better than even the best French recitals out there.

The clean, fat-free, unforced Gens voice is perfect for revealing the emotional specificity of this repertoire – often, one hears an attractively tranquil core in the voice – while using the language with natural directness. Music and words aren’t consciously projected so much as they’re felt and sung from the inside out. Though Alice Coote is as cultivated a tour guide as one could want in her French recital ‘L’heure exquise’ on Hyperion (another runner up), she is still an observer, in contrast to Gens, who becomes each song’s protagonist.



‘Néère’

Mélodies by Chausson,

Duparc, Hahn et al

Véronique Gens sop

Susan Manoff pf

Alpha (E) ALPHA215 (1/16)

Producer & Engineer

Daniel Zalay

91 votes

Without staking her claim on a well-circumscribed viewpoint, she presents a song’s inner truth, leaving the listener to discover their multi-textured meaning differently during repeated hearings, especially Hahn’s ‘A Chloris’, whose words speak of bliss but whose piano writing can sound like a lament. In sophisticated Duparc songs, Susan Manoff’s pianism in the postludes take the songs to yet another level. Finally, the sequencing of the songs is masterful. Though Chausson’s Mélodies Op 2 are intact, the others are ordered for their continuity and dramatic contrast in a loose narrative on the agonies and rewards of love.

David Patrick Stearns

RUNNERS-UP



‘L’heure exquise’ A French Songbook

Alice Coote mez

Graham Johnson pf

Hyperion (E) CDA67962 (5/15)

63 votes



Beethoven Lieder & Bagatellen

Werner Güra ten

Christoph Berner pf

Harmonia Mundi (E) HMC90 2217 (A/15)

60 votes

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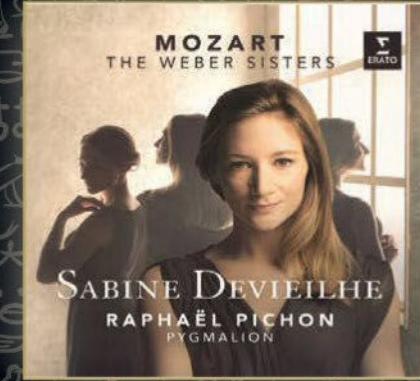
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SIR ANTONIO PAPPANO

Anja Harteros, Jonas Kaufmann
Ekaterina Semenchuk, Ludovic Tezier, Erwin Schrott
Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia

RECITAL AWARD



SABINE DEVIEILHE

Pygmalion
Raphaël Pichon

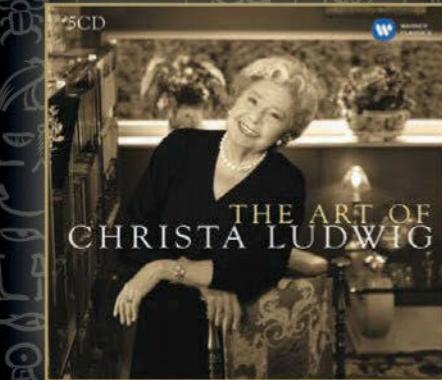
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VILDE FRANG

Frankfurt Radio Orchestra
James Gaffigan

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BAGATELLES OP.126**

NELSON GOERNER

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**GIOVANNI ANTONINI
IL GIARDINO ARMONICO**

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CONTEMPORARY

WINNER **Abrahamsen** let me tell you

'There's an aura about this performance that makes it lodge in the memory'

Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* is an orchestral song-cycle to texts by – well, not Shakespeare exactly, though all the words come from Shakespeare. Paul Griffiths's poems use only words spoken by Ophelia in *Hamlet*. So are these Ophelia's 'snatches of old tunes'? Maybe. Maybe not. The final image has her walking forward through falling snow. 'I will go on' she sings: thoughts trapped in that eternally-frozen vocabulary, but heart freed by Abrahamsen's music. Written for Barbara Hannigan in 2013, *let me tell you* has already won RPS and Grawemeyer Awards, and despite strong competition, it was an overwhelming first choice for this *Gramophone* Award.

All of which is fascinating enough – but gives no idea of how compelling, how moving, and how ravishingly, piercingly beautiful this music is. Griffiths plays with images of memory and sunlight, and Abrahamsen's breathtakingly refined score at first sounds just as brilliant and lucid. Hannigan keens and stutters against a glinting orchestral horizon. Only as the cycle progresses do you begin to sense the emotional undertow pulling inevitably, symphonically, towards a coruscating climax and a final song that in its quiet, transfiguring swell of tenderness and warmth evokes Mahler's 'Der Abschied' in *Das Lied von der Erde*.

Abrahamsen has written much that is thoughtful and beautiful: but never, perhaps, anything with quite the emotional directness of *let me tell you*, and it deserves to find the widest possible audience. Hannigan is radiant, handling the extended techniques and fearsome leaps of the vocal line as if they were Strauss. Nelsons and the Bavarian RSO play with intense sensitivity and a sound that, *Parsifal*-like, glows from within. There's an aura about this performance that makes it lodge in the memory, and Winter & Winter's inspired decision to release it without a coupling means that you can give it your undivided attention. Few works written this century will repay that more richly.

Richard Bratby



Abrahamsen

let me tell you

Barbara Hannigan sop

Bavarian Radio Symphony

Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

Winter & Winter

⑤ 910 232-2 (3/16)

Producer **Wolfram Nehls**

Engineer **Christiane Voitz**

161 votes



RUNNERS-UP



Anderson In lieblicher Bläue. Alleluia, etc

Carolin Widman vn **London Philharmonic Orchestra & Choir / Vladimir Jurowski**

LPO ⑤ LPO0089 (4/16)

101 votes



Birtwistle Angel Fighter. In Broken Images.

Virelai (Sus une fontayne)

Soloists; BBC Singers; London Sinfonietta / David Atherton

NMC ⑤ NMCD211 (7/15) **94 votes**

GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

David Gutman is enthralled by a new disc of Mahler's unfinished Tenth Symphony from Seattle that all but trumps its many predecessors



Mahler

Symphony No 10 (performing version by Deryck Cooke)

Seattle Symphony Orchestra /

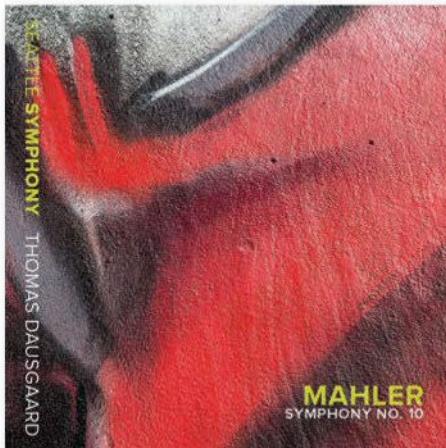
Thomas Dausgaard

Seattle Symphony Media ® SSM1011 (72' • DDD)

Recorded live at Benaroya Hall, Seattle,
November 19, 21 & 22, 2015

'It seems that the Ninth is a limit. He who wants to go beyond it must pass away. It seems as if something might be imparted to us which we ought not yet to know, for which we are not ready.' Arnold Schoenberg might just have been wrong though. The resurrection of Mahler's projected Tenth may have triggered a permanent shift in perception. And, of course, Shostakovich did manage 15!

When a composition comes down to us as a work in progress, it is only to be expected that musicologists and interpreters should feel entitled to innovate. Thomas Dausgaard adopts the familiar Deryck Cooke performing version but gives it a potent new slant. If you only know the conductor from his buoyant post-authenticist work with the Swedish Chamber Orchestra you may be surprised by his force and conviction as a Mahlerian. Three concert performances, dedicated to the victims of terrorist attacks in Paris and Beirut, have been edited together to make a convincing own-label release and I should say at once that the standard of execution is astonishing given that the Seattle Symphony had never previously encountered the 'complete' score. I can't remember hearing a more turbulent and propulsive rendition, nor one that does so much to address the string-heavy bias of the Cooke realisation.



*You may be surprised
by Thomas Dausgaard's
force and conviction
as a Mahlerian*

Dausgaard sees the music differently from Yannick Nézet-Séguin, whose occasionally somnambulistic, less than squeaky-clean recent Montreal account is comprehensively outclassed. So too are most of its predecessors. Even the

opening *Adagio* sounds freshly imagined in Seattle, a switchback ride embracing almost expressionless torpor, passionate bloom and even puckish humour at the expense, perhaps, of a measure of its horror and ferocity. The strings are remarkably assured even in the highest-lying writing; and, if you like consequential phrasing and copious old-school portamentos, this will be a must-have. Wind contributions are similarly characterful. Those lean chamber-music textures (whose provisional quality is surely the strongest argument against performing the *Adagio* as a freestanding entity) sound more than usually finished.

The conductor's passionate temperament is yet more evident in the second and fourth movements. Some will find him too loud, too pressurised and too fast in the first Scherzo but he takes the players with him, transforming what can sound awkwardly tentative into a proto-Hindemithian whirlwind of colour and noise with a virtuoso dash to the finish. The second Scherzo is just as racy, its mood-changes deftly handled with real Viennese charm in the Trio section

and a wonderfully clear and clean winding-down towards the finale. The transition involves the kind of monumental, ear-rending bass drum thwacks that a young Simon Rattle favoured in his early Bournemouth recording. In concert, Riccardo Chailly has lately tried prefacing the main beats with extra grace notes to simulate a tattoo. Duller solitary thuds remain the ubiquitous solution on disc.

Those who have grown up with Rattle or Kurt Sanderling will notice some additional textual departures. While excising one of the indicated drum strokes to pass seamlessly into the finale has not become





A game-changer for all concerned: Thomas Dausgaard and the Seattle Symphony in performance at Benaroya Hall

the norm, unsuspecting listeners might nevertheless suspect an editing fault when interpreters like Dausgaard stick by what the composer actually drafted. There are no percussive reinforcements at the return of the *Adagio*'s piled-up breakdown chord. Nor will you find bass clarinet deployed in lieu of bassoon for Cooke's pastiche counterpoint from bar 162 of the *Adagio* itself. Perhaps Dausgaard's Seattle music-making can be fractionally less emotive than was Rattle's in Bournemouth but the results are rarely less than supercharged. The lugubrious tuba solo with which Cooke chose to initiate the fifth movement is as impressive as any. I haven't mentioned the central 'Purgatorio' because it's difficult to imagine it better done. The team's absolute commitment to their principal guest conductor can scarcely be doubted.

To cap it all, the packaging is classy, with individualistic annotations from the

conductor himself. Discussing the music in terms of biography and psychology does not give rise to a 'sentimentalised' performance. Heartfelt exclamations addressed directly to Mahler's beloved Alma famously litter the manuscript – 'für dich leben! für dich sterben!' ('to live for you! to die for you!') – yet the outcome here is properly cogent, life-affirming and schmaltz-free. The recording per se is very vivid too, bringing everything a little close in order to exclude audience noise. In the event one can imagine the lucky patrons of Seattle's state-of-the-art Benaroya Hall listening in rapt silence. This exceptional issue from the Pacific Northwest ought to be a game-changer for all concerned. **G**

Selected comparisons:

Bournemouth SO, Rattle (12/80^b) (WARN) ➤ 556972-2

Berlin SO, Sanderling (9/01^b) (BERL) 0300440BC

Montreal Metropolitan Orch, Nézet-Séguin

(12/15) (ATMA) ACD2 2711

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Harriet Smith on a fine concerto coupling from Danae Dörken:

'She is utterly attuned to Mendelssohn's idiom, allowing the slow introduction to unfold with an easy freedom' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 55**



Andrew Achenbach surveys some recent English symphonic releases:

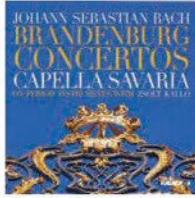
'Brabbins elicits a commendably alert response from the RSNO, ripely captured by the microphones' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**

JS Bach

Brandenburg Concertos, BWV1046-1051

Capella Savaria / Zsolt Kalló

Hungaroton (2) HCD32786/7 (87' • DDD)



There is not much Bach in the Capella Savaria discography but this *Brandenburg Concertos* set follows on from a violin concertos disc issued only last year (4/15), and shows remarkable consistency with it in its various strengths and weaknesses.

The most oddly idiosyncratic of them is a tendency for first-movement tempi to sound a little rushed and unsettled, while finales (into which category, as a type, we can put the third movement of No 1) tend to hit the road with just the right mix of pace and control, No 3 being the only exception. Their best overall performance is a buoyant, grainy and gutsy No 6, while other highlights include a well-judged balance in No 1 between the 'outdoor' and 'indoor' personae of the horns, some brightly confident trumpet-playing by László Borsónyi in No 2, and in No 3 some pleasingly varied bass-line articulation in the downward passage at 3'23" in the first movement and a tidy solution to the two-chord second-movement problem. Taken as a whole, however, these readings are unexceptional and uneventful; and indeed, in slow movements, often rather perfunctory. While the standard of playing is perfectly acceptable, the phrasing can be haphazard and the orchestral sound just that little bit more coarse and unfinished than it should be. The recorded image could also be more spacious.

You'll probably have guessed by now that I can't see this recording as one to challenge the best in a field so teeming with talent. There are many other *Brandenburg* experiences more likely to excite, and thus there seems little reason to choose it over, for example, the keen zing of the Dunedin Consort (Linn, A/13), the suave polish of Florilegium (Channel

Classics, 1/15), the relaxed expertise of Trevor Pinnock's European Brandenburg Ensemble (Avie, 3/08) or, if you want some real adventure, the fast-car thrill of Musica Antiqua Köln (Archiv, 3/88). **Lindsay Kemp**

Bartók

Contrasts^a. Dance Suite^b.

The Miraculous Mandarin^c

^aMark van de Wiel cl^aZsolt-Tihamér Visontay vn

^aYefim Bronfman pf^aPhilharmonia Voices;

^bcPhilharmonia Orchestra / Esa-Pekka Salonen

Signum (2) SIGCD466 (69' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London,

^cJanuary 27, ^{a,b}October 27, 2011



This disc presents a satisfying if somewhat quirkily planned programme. Near the opening of *The Miraculous Mandarin* ballet Salonen takes heed of Bartók's *poco allargando* marking, a directive that in the wrong hands makes the orchestra sound as if it's struggling. Not here though. Also, with Salonen the distinction between the *pianissimo* bass clarinet and the *piano* clarinet in A at the start of the first decoy game is very well judged, the girl – a beautiful young girl forced to lure men – seeming here tentative, even a little shy at first. That works too. Superb clarinet playing from the Philharmonia soloists, as in the two subsequent games, where the tension mounts (screaming woodwinds really tell) and Salonen marks the mandarin's arrival with gutsy accents and powerful brass. Great syncopated trombones at the lead-in to the 'chase', taken at a frighteningly fast tempo (a little too fast to achieve a truly *ruvido* – rough – edge maybe), the climax slowing to *marcatissimo*, as prescribed.

But the real draw in this performance is the sequence beyond the 'chase' where the tramps leap out (tr 7), strip the mandarin of his valuables and attempt to suffocate him. Beyond that, and in spite of the tramps' attempt at murder, the mandarin can only

die when his longing for the girl is fulfilled. Salonen keeps this highly graphic and emotionally potent music on the move, so much so that you begin to wonder why anyone bothers with the suite: as with Ravel's *Mother Goose* ballet, the whole work is so much more effective, and this performance is more compelling than most. It generates a genuine sense of theatre.

The *Dance Suite* is very good too, though I would have liked a more razor-sharp edge to the trombones in the second dance. Salonen sustains an especially beautiful performance of the tranquil fourth dance and delivers a firmly decisive finale. Interesting that, rather than offer us, say, the two *Romanian Dances* or the *Hungarian Peasant Songs*, Signum rounds things off with a sensitive, very well-played and pleasingly droll rendition of *Contrasts* with Yefim Bronfman underpinning violinist Zsolt-Tihamér Visontay and clarinettist Mark van de Wiel. The finale is especially effective.

As to a top choice for the complete *Mandarin*, Fischer is still pretty amazing and his recording has more clarity than this Signum production which, although not lacking in presence, does occasionally want for internal clarity. But it's a great disc all the same. **Rob Cowan**

Brahms · Schumann

'For the Love of Brahms'

Brahms Concerto for Violin and Cello, 'Double', Op 102^a. Piano Trio No 1, Op 8 (original version)^b

Schumann Violin Concerto, WoO23 - Langsam (codetta by Britten)^a

^aSteven Isserlis vc^b Jeremy Denk pf^aAcademy of St Martin in the Fields / ^{ab}Joshua Bell vn

Sony Classical (2) 889853217922 (76' • DDD)



Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis are distinct musical personalities yet they work together extremely well in Brahms's interpretatively perilous Double Concerto – Bell's sweet-toned ardour is at once anchored and



Sarah-Jane Bradley: persuasive accounts of a quartet of pieces for viola and orchestra

buoyed by Isserlis's gruffer, more ruminative style. They shape their interwoven lines with care, so that even extensive, ornately configured sequences sound cogently long-breathed, as at 5'09" in the opening *Allegro*. Both highlight expressive details while maintaining a feeling of flowing inevitability – note, for instance, the elegant use of portamento at 12'35" in the slow movement. And, crucially, they know when to tighten the screws to build emotional pressure. If only the orchestra played with a comparable level of intensity.

Everything is in its place, mind you. The Academy of St Martin in the Fields' ensemble is tight and the score's thick textures are clarified by the smaller string section, although at times I'll admit I wanted more heft. But listen at 7'36" in the first movement: Bell and Isserlis pull their syncopations thrillingly taut, then the orchestra enters and the music suddenly goes limp. This happens again and again, which leads me to believe that unlike, say, Bach's Double Concerto, Brahms's requires a conductor's full attention.

Happily, the B major Trio is wholly satisfying – and it's played here in the 1854 edition, which is considerably more diffuse than the more familiar 1889 revision. I'm not going to argue that the original version

is superior. It's not. But it is fascinatingly flawed, with Hoffmannesque flights of fancy. Bell, Isserlis and pianist Jeremy Denk relish all the oddities and are generally more forgiving of its weaknesses than Trio Wanderer on a recent Harmonia Mundi release.

As a kind of intermezzo between the concerto and the trio, we are given a full-throated account of the slow movement of Schumann's late Violin Concerto, here with a prominent cello solo. I prefer the confidential tone of Bell's earlier Decca recording (5/96) but this performance is valuable as it includes a brief codetta by Britten, written to make it a standalone piece – Schumann's original segues directly to the finale – for Dennis Brain's 1958 memorial concert. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Piano Trio No 1 – selected comparison:
Trio Wanderer (3/16) (HARM) HMC90 2222*

Clarke · Dale · Walthew · Warner

Clarke Viola Concerto (orch Ruth Lomon)
Dale Suite, Op 2 – Romance **Walthew** **A Mosaic in Ten Pieces (with Dedication)** **Warner Suite, Op 58** (orch Tim Seddon)
Sarah-Jane Bradley *vla*
Hallé Orchestra / Stephen Bell
Dutton Epoch F CDLX7329 (75' • DDD/DSD)



Richard Walthew's *A Mosaic in Ten Pieces (with Dedication)* is a long name for a short work.

So try this. Dive straight in on the second piece (tr 6). The orchestra gives a gentle push and Sarah-Jane Bradley's viola begins its waltz: graceful, natural, a playful little slide here, a brief flush of vibrato there – just enough to make the phrase smile. And while Stephen Bell and the Hallé certainly never get in the way, the quizzical woodwind comments and that discreet but unmistakable light-music swing show that they're enjoying this music every bit as much as she is.

Everything on this disc is a premiere recording (at least in these versions), and none of it, perhaps, is music to change the world – with the exception of Rebecca Clarke's Viola Concerto, an idiomatic and sensitive orchestration by Ruth Lomon of Clarke's superb Sonata. But everything here is played with love. Bradley makes a beautiful sound: her tone is warm but focused and she has that rare gift of making her instrument sound as if it's on the brink of articulate speech. Bell and the Hallé are

wonderfully mellow and expressive partners (never just accompanists), and Dutton's engineers let their sound bloom.

The Clarke is the highlight: orchestrations of chamber works rarely improve on the original but anything that brings Clarke to a wider audience is worthwhile – especially when played with such poetry and ardour. However, if you'd like to discover Walthew's quirky little suite, Harry Waldo Warner's slightly spikier Suite in D minor or the expansive, autumnal and rather Bax-like Romance by Benjamin Dale, it's hard to imagine more persuasive accounts. **Richard Bratby**

Copland



'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'

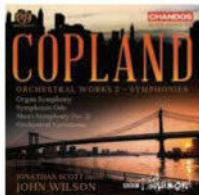
Symphony for Organ and Orchestra^a.

Symphonic Ode. Symphony No 2, 'Short Symphony'. Orchestral Variations

Jonathan Scott org

BBC Philharmonic Orchestra / John Wilson

Chandos (F) CHSA5171 (69' • DDD/DSD)



In contrast with the first instalment of Chandos's series of Copland's orchestral music (3/16), which focused on the popular ballets, this second release delves into some of the composer's less well-known symphonic works. The earliest piece here is the *Organ Symphony*, which Copland wrote in 1924 shortly after completing his studies in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. Despite the influence of European composers, Stravinsky in particular, on Copland's writing at this time, it's a dramatic and characterful piece that leaves a lasting impression. This superb performance by Jonathan Scott and John Wilson easily matches the classic 1960s version by E Power Biggs and Leonard Bernstein.

Although the *Organ Symphony* was considered modernist by critics of the day, the *Symphonic Ode*, completed in 1929, finds Copland using an altogether more abstract and dissonant style. Following the premiere under Koussevitzky, the score fell into neglect despite a revision in 1955 to reduce the size of the orchestral forces required. Both Michael Tilson Thomas and Copland himself have recorded the work to impressive effect but Wilson has a strong feel for the music and communicates an additional feeling of triumph in the closing section that's enormously compelling.

Copland's abstract period also manifests itself in the complex rhythms and lean

scoring of the *Short Symphony* (Symphony No 2), completed in 1933, although the buoyant outer movements and wistful tenderness of the central section hint at the more populist idiom that would shortly follow. Copland's own recording with the LSO has an unsurpassed communicative zeal but the playing is occasionally fallible, a charge that could never be laid against the superbly drilled and articulate response that Wilson obtains from the BBC Philharmonic.

Rounding off this collection is a grippingly intense performance of the *Orchestral Variations*, Copland's 1957 transcription of his concentrated and astringent *Piano Variations* of 1930. Both the original piano version and the orchestral arrangement bear the influence of Schoenberg and neither has found much favour with performers or audiences. Nevertheless, as this performance makes clear, this powerful and imposing work is one of Copland's greatest achievements. Copland made a strong case for it in his 1968 recording but Wilson's version is even finer, and the recording is of demonstration quality. An outstanding release. **Christian Hoskins**

Organ Symphony – selected comparison:

E Power Biggs, New York PO, **Leonard Bernstein** (10/68^R, 11/00) (SONY) SM2K47232

Symphonic Ode – selected comparisons:

LSO, Copland (6/73^R, 11/00) (SONY) SM2K47232

San Francisco SO, Tilson Thomas

(3/87) (RCA) 09026 68541-2

Short Symphony – selected comparison:

LSO, Copland (11/69^R, 2/81^R, 11/00) (SONY) SM2K47232

Orchestral Variations – selected comparison:

LSO, Copland (6/73^R, 11/00) (SONY) SM2K47232

Corigliano · Copland · Torke

Copland Appalachian Spring – Ballet Suite

Corigliano Symphony No 1

Torke Bright Blue Music

National Orchestral Institute Philharmonic Orchestra / David Alan Miller

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559782 (74' • DDD)



This is the third recording of John Corigliano's Symphony No 1, the American composer's enraged and elegiac response to the Aids crisis. It's a work of neither great subtlety nor structural coherence, but rather makes its case through extreme contrasts, veering vertiginously from fits of explosive fury to wistful sentimentality. Corigliano is an accomplished film composer, and whatever

blunt emotional power the work yields is accomplished through skilful, imaginative scoring and an acute sense of the dramatic. The symphony was composed in 1988, the same year as the founding of the National Orchestral Institute, a month-long summer training programme for conservatory students, based at the University of Maryland. That such a polished, expressively pointed performance as this was made in a single day in June 2015 by an ad hoc orchestra of pre-professional players is mightily impressive.

Michael Torke's euphoric *Bright Blue Music* – another American score from the 1980s – is also expertly done and provides a clever foil for the Corigliano. Torke plays with the idea that harmonies derive meaning from their usage and creates all his material from the two most common chords: tonic and dominant. Whether he succeeds in maintaining interest for the nine-minute duration is questionable, but it's a pleasantly diverting experiment.

Copland's *Appalachian Spring* might seem out of place here but David Alan Miller's audaciously unsentimental view of the well-worn ballet suite is so refreshing it hardly matters. Copland's debt to neo-classicism is unmistakable in Miller's hands, yet, for all its razor-sharp edges, the music still has the grace to delight – thanks in large part to the NOI Philharmonic's collective virtuosity. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

B Dean



'Shadow Music'

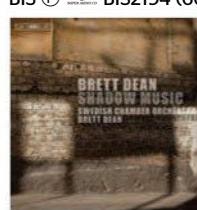
Beethoven String Quartet No 7, Op 59 No 1 – Adagio molto e mesto (arr Dean) **B Dean**

Etüdenfest^a. Shadow Music. Short Stories. Testament

Magnus Skold pf

Swedish Chamber Orchestra / Brett Dean

BIS (F) BIS2194 (66' • DDD/DSD)



This superb new release in BIS's series devoted to Brett Dean takes its name of the longest piece in the collection. *Shadow Music* is an anxious 2002 triptych with the whimpering, straining 'Forgotten Garden' at its core, an evocation of verdure that's 'a shadow of its former self' (Dean) and not at all happy about it.

But the recording's title applies throughout, too, though the shadows come in differing shades. First there's the shadow of other musicians in *Etüdenfest* (2000), a harrowing portrait of string players at practice. A blurry whirl of études, finger turners, scales and arpeggios

creates a neurotic chaos, the music seeming at one point to drift off to sleep, with exercises the only dreams, before tuning up again in a daze. At the end, an unwelcome interloper breaks in – a pianist, inciting mayhem and collapse.

There's the shadow of other composers in *Short Stories* (2005). That might mean an earlier generation of miniaturists that Dean is consciously paying homage to, such as Webern and Satie, or contemporaries with the gnarlier, more abrasive language that Dean hints at in 'Devotional' and 'Embers' but rejects in the closing 'Arietta', a tender elegy that's the last of five narratives.

And then there's the shadow of Beethoven. (Isn't there always?) Dean's *Testament* (2008) has already appeared in its original 2002 version for 12 violas (1/14), and that constrained palette might better suit the subject matter – a thrash against deafness, a struggle for a way forwards – than this feverish orchestration. Even so, given *Testament's* quotations from the slow movement of the first 'Razumovsky' Quartet, Dean's 2013 arrangement of the Beethoven for strings, clarinet and flute makes for a delicate, characterful prelude. Like everything else here, it's dispatched with breathtaking ease by the Swedish Chamber Orchestra. **David Allen**

Debussy · Stravinsky

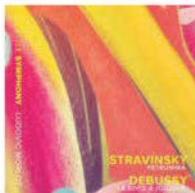
Debussy La boîte à joujoux (arr Caplet)

Stravinsky Petrushka (1947 version)^a

Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot

Seattle Symphony Media Ⓜ SSM1010 (69' • DDD)

^a Recorded live at Benaroya Hall, Seattle, June 19 & 21, 2014



Competition could scarcely be fiercer in *Petrushka*. Unlike Vladimir Jurowski's recent offering, this one opts for the 1947 version. The results don't quite have the *n*th degree of velocity and panache required to counter the absence of 1911's glittery glockenspiel and other Impressionistic effects, but there are some imaginative touches, especially from the winds. In bringing the puppets to life the Showman's magical flute solo is not to be rushed. The Ballerina/trumpeter pirouettes without the awkward underpinning lately encouraged by Mariss Jansons. And if the ejection of Petrushka from the Moor's quarters seems comparatively sedate, Ludovic Morlot is doubtless being faithful to the printed page. Go to Leonard Bernstein or Simon Rattle if you want more adrenalin, albeit in

lower fi. This clean and dextrous live account, shorn of applause by the way, is eminently recommendable.

The toyshop ballet coupling, made without an audience, is thematically well chosen and only those listening straight through in the old-fashioned way might be disconcerted that it follows on with scarcely a break. Although a sophisticated alternative from Rattle's Berliners remains in the lists, it's not difficult to guess why recordings tend to get subsumed within more comprehensive Debussy surveys. The playthings of the André Hellé tale are brought to life in comparatively innocuous fashion, the invention oddly thin.

Sympathetic listeners will nonetheless be captivated by the delicate scoring and wonder where Debussy's contribution ends and André Caplet's begins. Morlot's orchestra goes from strength to strength, yet those spare timbres were tangier under the likes of Jean Martinon, the tempi slightly more urgent. You might detect more charm there too, despite the woozier 1970s analogue sound. **David Gutman**

Petrushka – selected comparisons:

NYPO, Bernstein (9/70^R) (SONY) Ⓜ 82876 78749-2

CBSO, Rattle (3/88^R) (WARN) 967711-2 or 242754-2

BRSO, Jansons (12/15) (BRKL) 900141

LPO, Jurowski (9/16) (LPO) LPO0091

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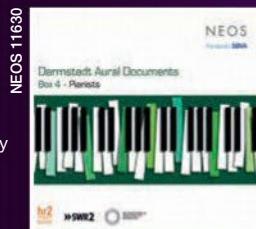


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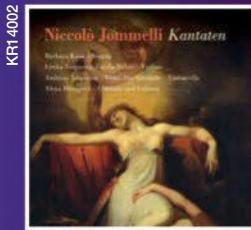


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*La boîte à joujoux – selected comparisons:*ORTF Nat Orch, Martinon (2/75^R) (WARN) ▶ 365240-2
BPO, Rattle (10/05^R) (EMI) 558045-2**Debussy · Poulenc · Roussel****Debussy** Six Epigraphes antiques(orch Ansermet) **Poulenc** Les biches – Suite**Roussel** Bacchus et Ariane, Op 43 – Two Suites**Suisse Romande Orchestra / Kazuki Yamada**

Pentatone (F) PTC5186 558 (76' • DDD/DSD)



Kazuki Yamada's new album forms a tacit tribute to the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande's founder Ernest Ansermet, since the latter's orchestration of Debussy's *Six Epigraphes antiques* forms its centrepiece and to some extent its *raison d'être*. A work with a curious history, it started out as a setting for reciter and chamber ensemble of Pierre Louÿs's *Chansons de Bilitis* (not to be confused with the songs based on the same text), before being revised, minus the poetry, for piano duet in 1914. Debussy's subsequent plans to orchestrate it himself came to nothing.

Some have seemingly questioned just how successfully Ansermet's version, completed in 1939, mirrors Debussy's own style and the booklet-notes argue that the instrumentation more closely approximates that of Ravel. It's a work of sparse musical gestures, sensuous yet austere, rooted in a sequence of woodwind solos – flute, oboe, bassoon – surrounded and supported by string figurations and the sparest touches of orchestral colour. You can't help but feel that Debussy (and Ravel, for that matter) would have been less unvarying. It's nicely done though, with the OSR woodwind and strings playing with poise and Yamada controlling the narrow dynamic range with great skill.

The ballet suites that accompany it are more variable. Yamada's way with Roussel is high-voltage if occasionally raw around the edges, which means that the First Suite from *Bacchus et Ariane*, with its motoric rhythms and relentless momentum, generates considerable excitement, and the Bacchanale that closes the Second becomes a real roller-coaster ride, with the OSR brass on thrilling form. *Les biches*, however, is oddly solid. The string sound – lean in *Bacchus et Ariane* – is rightly warmer here, and the Baroque inflections nicely to the fore. But it lacks wit, the Rag-Mazurka sags in the middle and the Andantino is metronomic and unyielding. It's beautifully played, but not as good as the versions by Prêtre, Désormière or Frémaux. **Tim Ashley**

FieldPiano Concerto No 7^a. Irish Concerto –Allegro moderato^b. Piano Sonata No 4**Benjamin Frith** pf^a**Northern Sinfonia / David Haslam; bRoyal Scottish National Orchestra / Andrew Mogrelia**

Naxos (M) 8 573262 (66' • DDD)

^aRecorded 1996

With this disc, Benjamin Frith finally completes his cycle of Field's piano concertos. The Seventh Concerto was made back in 1996 with the same forces as the earlier instalments in the cycle – the Northern Sinfonia and David Haslam. I can only think this has hung around gathering dust until now as it was short of a disc-mate. That has been provided by the so-called *Irish Concerto*, a piece new to me (and not mentioned by Field's biographers) which is in fact a reworking of the first movement of the Second Concerto, into which the composer inserted a nocturne. It certainly benefits from the characterful playing of the RSNO under Andrew Mogrelia but even Frith can't disguise the fact that it's a bit of a ragbag – a single extended movement lasting nearly 23 minutes. There's plenty of fine filigree, beautifully realised, but ultimately it's more about gesture than depth.

The new version of No 7, a work much admired by Schumann, makes slightly less of its darker qualities at the outset than Bamert's LMP, but Frith conveys the movement's generous melodiousness with complete naturalness and only towards its close (sample from 15'57" of tr 1) did I hanker after a Shelley or a Hough to bring Field's virtuosity truly to life. The following Rondo is marked *Allegro moderato* and Frith and Haslam take a markedly elegant approach, yet Míceál O'Rourke's faster tempo allows Field's unexpected silences and sly accentuations to make more effect. The latter version also finds a greater playfulness at the witty passage around 8'04". Frith is, however, unfailingly musical and palpably enjoys the panache of its ending.

The Fourth Piano Sonata (recorded in 2013) – modest in dimensions and aspirations – is charming enough and again performed with commitment, Frith never less than elegant. In the end, though, a disc for completists, I rather think. **Harriet Smith**
*Piano Concerto No 7 – selected comparison:
O'Rourke, London Mozart Plyrs, Bamert
(CHAN) CHAN10468*

Ginastera**Estudios sinfonicos**, Op 35. **Glosses sobre temas de Pau Casals**, Op 48. **Iubilum**, Op 51.

Concerto for Strings, Op 33

Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin / Arturo Tamayo

Capriccio (F) C5271 (77' • DDD)



The Concerto for Strings (1965) and *Glosses on Themes by Pablo Casals* (heard here in its original string orchestra version of 1976) – masterpieces from Alberto Ginastera's late, modernist period – are both well represented on disc. New to the catalogue are the *Estudios sinfonicos* ('Symphonic Etudes'), arguably his most experimental work.

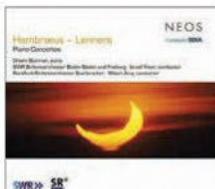
Composed for the Vancouver Symphony to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Canadian independence, the studies employ an arsenal of (then) avant-garde techniques, including microtonal writing and improvisatory passages. Truth be told, it's only intermittently successful. At times it seems as if Ginastera had tried to cram as many novel sounds into the score as possible. Apparently, he himself was dissatisfied with the result and made several major revisions, including ditching an entire movement. It's certainly worthwhile to have on record, however. The second movement, entitled 'Para los movimientos aligerados' ('For Winged Movements') is wonderfully evocative of whispery, fluttering motion, and Ginastera's innate dramatic sense is manifest in something as subtle as a short harp glissando (at 2'01").

Iubilum (1980), another celebratory commission – this for the 400th anniversary of the founding of Buenos Aires – was previously recorded by the Louisville Orchestra. It, too, is an odd score: the jubilation suggested by the title is only evident in small sections that seem like addenda. Instead, the overall mood is gravely ceremonial, with a hint of tragic grandeur in the opening fanfare. The Louisville recording was good but this is both better played and better recorded. The Concerto and *Glosses* are also extremely well done. Arturo Tamayo elicits committed, colourful playing from the DSO Berlin and the engineering is first-rate. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Hambræus · Lenners**Hambræus** Piano Concerto^a**Lenners** Piano Concerto, 'Phaeton'^b**Ortwin Stürmer** pf^b**Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra / Gilbert Amy;** ^a**SWR Symphony**

Orchestra, Baden-Baden & Freiburg / Israel Yinon

Neos (F) NEOS11311 (58' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^aKonzerthaus Freiburg, February 25, 1997; ^bGrosser Sendesaal, Funkhaus Halberg, Saarbrücken, February 10, 2003

Ortwin Stürmer is the pianist for whom Horatiu Rădulescu wrote much of his piano music, works of which Stürmer made the premiere recordings (they are currently being re-recorded for Mode by Stephen Clarke). This Neos disc features Stürmer as soloist in two concertos similarly dedicated to him, each of which is propelled by a certain *Sturm und Drang*.

Bengt Hambræus's Piano Concerto (1991-92) is a robust single-movement work lasting around 40 minutes. Hambræus characterised the concerto as 'a gigantic block with different densities'; distinct sections are eschewed in favour of a continuous, rhythmically driven texture in which piano and orchestra integrate rather than alternate. While Hambræus's early, cluster-based organ music influenced Ligeti's *Volumina*, this concerto is neo-tonal in character, and the insistent occurrence throughout of a bell-like chord, major thirds and minor sixths, suggests kinship with the tonality of Arvo Pärt, albeit shot through with dramatic tension. Stürmer drives the work with urgency, though Hambræus's material wears thin by the end.

The story of Phaeton, as found in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, provides Luxembourg composer Claude Lenners with the programme for his Concerto for piano and string orchestra (1999). Lenners presents the young Greek – who insisted on riding the chariot of the sun, only to lose control of the reins – as an analogy for our contemporary technology-riven society. The piano style, as in the Hambræus, tends to the percussive, lines galloping up and down the keyboard throughout. Lenners's score is finely poised: more or less continuous piano is backed by a wide range of string textures, from straightforward tremolo to extended techniques.

Each of these recordings is from a live performance; accordingly, in the Hambræus the winds can at times be difficult to make out, while in the Lenners the page-turning is occasionally audible.

Liam Cagney

Mahler

Symphony No 9

Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim

C Major Entertainment (F) DVD 750408;



(F) (BD) 750504 (79' + 22' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •

DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0)

Recorded live at the Berlin Philharmonie, April 5, 2009

Video director **Andreas Morell**

Bonus: The Mahler Project: Daniel Barenboim and Pierre Boulez working on the symphonies of Gustav Mahler



This isn't at all the Mahler Ninth one might have expected from Barenboim – although maybe, just maybe, his profound fascination with Arnold Schoenberg enables him to push Mahler's dark night of the soul closer to the edge of reason and radicalism than might otherwise have been the case. A strong pulse is established from the outset – the tempo marking *Andante comodo* taken at its word though 'comfortable' only in the sense of 'not too slow, not too fast'. Watching Barenboim is also fascinating as the beat is super-emphatic and those traditional, slightly old-fashioned rubatos are pared down to a minimum.

So an impulsive first movement with forensic attention to the grim reapers of the wind section – bass clarinet, stopped horns, muted trombones (highlighted by some obvious spotlighting in the recording balance) – and a series of scarifying climaxes, the last and biggest of which is truly a ride to the abyss. The eerie moments of repose find their own space – Barenboim does not, as Bernstein does, create space for them. In short, I'd say his reading is the more radical for its 'life is too short' urgency. The playing is predictably superb, the flute solo into the heart-easing coda especially memorable.

The no-nonsense approach continues, the Ländler-fest of the second movement sprightly and robust with its *gemülich* aspects kept on a pretty tight rein. This is country dancing on the rampage – the dance of life under duress. And such charm as there is turns to desperation in the Rondo-Burleske. Counterpoint for the neurotic. But what genius then to glimpse the valedictory finale at its still centre.

That finale brings a protracted hymn of deep, woody string-playing which must have sounded quite marvellous in the Berlin Philharmonie acoustic. But again Barenboim is 'straighter', less interventionist, than the likes of Bernstein, whose highly theatrical take on the disintegrating final pages (in his Concertgebouw recording on DG) adds controversy to Mahler's daring. With Abbado, in his now-famous Lucerne

Festival DVD, eternity is not glimpsed – as Bernstein would have it – between the notes but after they have faded. Almost five minutes of silent contemplation. Barenboim barely gives us five seconds.

The 'bonus' feature chronicles Barenboim and Boulez coming together to 'share' a cycle of the Mahler symphonies and along with snatches of rehearsal we gain some insight into their (surprisingly) not dissimilar conducting philosophies through a filmed conversation. One unfortunate metaphor from maestro Barenboim could turn this into a collector's item. **Edward Seckerson**

Selected comparison:

RCO, Bernstein (12/86^R) (DG) 477 5187GB5,

477 8668GB11 or 459 080-2GX16

Melartin

The Blue Pearl, Op 160 – Suite.

Marjatta, Op 79^a. Traumgesicht, Op 70

*Soile Isokoski sop

Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Hannu Lintu

Ondine (F) ODE1283-2 (57' • DDD • T/t)



Seeking to identify the author of *Traumgesicht* ('Dream Visage'), the innocent ear might guess early Delius or someone else under the spell of Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* – Humperdinck or Pierné, perhaps. Like Korngold, Erkki Melartin (1875–1937) trained under Robert Fuchs in Vienna. His style may not be quite as lush but it certainly favours a similar kind of instant gratification, and it's not hard to understand why its euphonious, if also derivative and anonymous idiom should have been well received at the 1910 premiere under Ziloti in St Petersburg.

The slightly later vocal-orchestral tone-poem *Marjatta* was dedicated to Aino Ackté, for whom Sibelius had recently composed *Luonnotar*. The comparison brings home the comparative naivety of Melartin's mindset (though the literalist cuckoo calls would, admittedly, have been hard to avoid, given the particular extract from the *Kalevala* he had chosen to set). Occasional, perhaps coincidental nods to Janáček in the grittier second half add to the attractions of a piece that should give lovers of latter-day national Romanticism exactly what they crave – as will, surely, Soile Isokoski's honeyed soprano.

Cuckoo calls also begin the first of eight extracts from *The Blue Pearl*, which has a clear claim to the collector's attention as the first ballet composed in Finland. The work retained some popularity there, too,

thanks no doubt to its easily assimilable characterisation and predictable phrasing.

Recorded in the Helsinki Music Centre, the Finnish Radio Symphony Orchestra may not be ideally opulent for such music. Still, under Hannu Lintu's firm guidance they present each piece in a favourable light. The disc also comes with an informative booklet, though the description of *Traumgesicht* as 'progressive' or *The Blue Pearl* as 'fresh' is surely somewhat optimistic. **David Fanning**

Mendelssohn · Mozart

Mendelssohn Piano Concerto No 2, Op 40

Mozart Piano Concerto No 21, K467

Danae Dörken *p*

Royal Northern Sinfonia / Lars Vogt

Ars Produktion (52' • DDD/DSD)



Lars Vogt here swaps the keyboard for the podium in a disc that showcases his erstwhile pupil Danae Dörken, still only 24. Her sensitive musicianship is immediately apparent and in the first movement of Mozart's K467 she adopts a light, slightly detached articulation which ensures textures

are never less than buoyant, while Vogt gets from the Royal Northern Sinfonia playing of colour and immediacy. The Mozart's infamously famous slow movement is set up with a wonderfully withdrawn sound in the strings and it's a pleasingly 'straight' account. For all Dörken's eloquence, though, Pires and Abbado remain pretty much peerless here – with Abbado setting up an effortless one-in-a-bar feel and Pires emerging almost imperceptibly from the string texture. The classic account from Uchida and Tate pulls us irresistibly into the opera house, and their finale has an irrepressible sense of *joie de vivre* which this new version can't quite match, musically though it unfailingly is.

It's good to have Mendelssohn rather than more Mozart as a coupling and temperamentally Dörken is utterly attuned to his idiom, allowing the slow introduction to unfold with an easy freedom. The fast movement proper combines liteness and airiness – there's no doubting her technical abilities when it comes to Mendelssohn's *scherzando* writing – and Vogt coaxes from the orchestra a similar ebullience. Just occasionally Dörken's rubato can sound slightly self-conscious – but it's a minor caveat. Her slow movement is particularly fine,

treating the melodic line as a true song without words. It is marked *Molto sostenuto*, a mood she captures well. The finale demands playfulness and Dörken's effortless fingeriness is very effective, if a degree less playful than Hough or Shelley. But, altogether, an enticing disc from a talent to watch. **Harriet Smith**

Mozart – selected comparisons:

Uchida, ECO, Tate (7/86⁸) (PHIL) 468 540-2PM2

Pires, COE, Abbado (2/96) (DG) 439 941-2GH,

471 738-GEN, 477 5747GMO or 479 1435GM2

Mendelssohn – selected comparisons:

Shelley, London Mozart Plyrs (4/94) (CHAN) CHAN9215

Hough, CBSO, Foster (9/97) (HYPE) CDA66969

Mendelssohn · Schumann

Mendelssohn Violin Concerto, Op 64

Schumann Violin Concerto, WoO23

Chamber Orchestra of Europe /

Carolin Widmann *v*n

ECM New Series (59' • DDD)



Perhaps we shouldn't enquire too deeply into the reasons for the sudden blossoming of Schumann's Violin Concerto as a repertoire work, but just be thankful. This

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Martyn Brabbins and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra continue their survey of Havergal Brian with his Second and Fourteenth Symphonies

If the numerous discoveries that have appeared on Dutton Epoch in recent years, few have struck me as more sheerly engaging than the Second Symphony by **John Gardner** (1917-2011). Completed in January 1985, it's a four-movement, 32-minute canvas of notable skill, thematic substance and personable warmth that really does live up to the claims made for it by the composer's son, who writes in the booklet of its 'unerring sense of structure and proportion, deftness of orchestration and concise symphonic development'. Especially arresting is the darkly plangent slow movement, which has something of the sustained intensity of Shostakovich – and how cleverly the finale draws together the symphony's multifarious moods and strands of material. Hats off to Adrian Brown and his Wimbledon-based Stoneleigh Youth Orchestra for commissioning it in the first place, and to Martin Yates and the RSNO for lending it such spry and affectionate advocacy.

It's coupled here with another impressive Second Symphony dating from two decades earlier by **John Veale** (1922-2006). Some 35 minutes in duration, this is a gloriously opulent, ardent outpouring, with many a conspicuous echo of the symphonies by, say, William Alwyn and Richard Arnell (like those figures, Veale also wrote

with distinction for the big screen), and culminating in an exciting *Allegro*, where the articulate fugal writing from 1'30" onwards is reminiscent of the finale of Walton's First Symphony, a work that sparked Veale's enthusiasm while a schoolboy at Repton (and where it was first introduced to him by his music teacher – yes, you've guessed it! – John Gardner). Again, Yates and company do this music proud, and Dexter Newman's multichannel SACD sound is big and bold to match.

Enthusiasts of that prolific symphonist **Havergal Brian** (1876-1972) will be well pleased with Martyn Brabbins's strongly communicative new version of the large-scale Second from 1930-31, the first to employ the composer's full complement of 16 extra horns in the roistering battleground of the third-movement scherzo. Inspired at least in part by Goethe's 1773 drama *Götz von Berlichingen* (based on the life of the maverick German imperial knight and poet), it's a 47-minute edifice of thrilling ambition, scored for sizeable forces (including quadruple woodwind and brass, three sets of timpani, two pianos and organ) and underpinned by a seam of sorrowful anguish that emerges most cathartically in the Sarabande-like slow movement and consolatory threnody of the extended finale. The latter also references Siegfried's Death and Funeral

March from *Götterdämmerung* and even the Dresden Amen from *Parsifal* (beam to 8'01" for some astonishingly individual writing for divided cellos and double basses – Brian's inspiration at its most compelling). John Pickard's analytical notes will prove a boon for newcomers negotiating their way through the work.

Premiered by Edward Downes and the LSO in a January 1969 BBC studio recording attended by the composer, the one-movement Fourteenth from 1959-60 comprises another agreeably knotty statement, brimful of adventure, incident and intrigue, and well worth grappling with on disc. Brabbins elicits a commendably alert response from the RSNO, ripely captured by the microphones, and this is indeed a pairing that deserves every success.

Dutton's groundbreaking efforts in this field have winningly built on a tradition established by Richard Itter's Lyrita Recorded Edition, and a four-CD compilation entitled 'British Symphonies' contains a healthy haul of treasures from that label, among them **William Alwyn**'s fervent January 1974 recording of his compelling Fifth Symphony (inspired by Sir Thomas Browne's remarkable *Hydriotaphia, Urn Burial*, published in 1658), Myer Fredman's splendid LPO version of **Arnold Bax**'s snarling First (a reading brimful

of feisty spontaneity and all the invigorating freshness of new discovery), **Lennox Berkeley**'s magnificently authoritative account of his own enviably taut Third (1968–69), **Edmund Rubbra**'s nourishing and effortlessly inevitable Fourth from 1940–42 (a most eloquent display from the Philharmonia under Norman Del Mar) and **William Wordsworth**'s involving and atmospheric Third of 1951 under Nicholas Braithwaite's sensitive lead (a worthy winner, this, of a *Gramophone* Award in 1991).

Further gems in what is a shrewdly chosen anthology include **Alan Rawsthorne**'s exhilarating *Symphonic Studies* (his breakthrough achievement from 1938, dashingly served by the LPO under John Pritchard); **Cyril Rootham**'s warm-hearted First Symphony (1931–32); **Grace Williams**'s memorably defiant Second (1956) and **John Joubert**'s affirmative, excitingly cogent First from 1955 – each in the safe hands of Vernon Handley; **Humphrey Searle**'s powerfully compassionate Second Symphony (1956–58), which finds the LPO on peak form under Josef Krips; **William Sterndale Bennett**'s endearing Symphony in G minor from 1864–67 and **Malcolm Arnold**'s pithy and characteristically wry Sinfonietta No 1 (1955), with the LPO and LSO respectively under Braithwaite; and, last but most definitely not least, **EJ Moeran**'s adorable Sinfonietta (1944) in Adrian Boult's peerless 1967 recording.

Nearly all of these productions remain demonstration-worthy in their naturalness of timbre, transparency and judicious balance – no surprise given that many were in fact supervised by Decca personnel (including that legendary sound engineer Kenneth Wilkinson) working in some of their favourite halls (Kingsway, Walthamstow and Watford). To sum up, then: five and a quarter hours of irreproachably eloquent music-making, allied to top-drawer sound and retailing for around £20. You really can't go wrong. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Gardner Sym No 2 **Veale** Sym No 2
RSNO / Yates

Dutton CDLX7332



Brian Symns Nos 2 & 14
RSNO / Brabbins

Dutton CDLX7330



Various Ctrs British Syms
Various artists

Lyrita CDLX2355

is not only one of umpteen to have appeared over the past couple of years but also the second to come from ECM in the space of three months. The previous one was performed by Thomas Zehetmair, directing the Paris Chamber Orchestra from the violin, and was paired with the C major *Phantasie* and the *Spring* Symphony (5/16); here, Carolin Widmann also directs from the fiddle, this time the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, and couples the Mendelssohn Concerto.

Widmann's approach echoes that of her Editor's Choice recording of Schumann's three violin sonatas (A/08). This performance is clearly the result of much thought and consideration, with selective use of vibrato and that 'growl' as Widmann digs into the G string (and not only in the more boisterous music) – as if she were dragging the music from the very wood of the instrument. The COE are with her all the way, responding to her instinctive rubato with a pleasing naturalness. The Schumann's slow movement is a thing of wonder and she dances through the polonaise finale with none of the sense – all too often felt – that it's an uphill trudge.

The Mendelssohn, too, comes off well, with the uneasy undertow of the opening movement duly acknowledged and a sweetening of tone for the *Andante* (and a true *pianissimo*) before the tension is dispelled in the tripping finale. Perhaps passagework is occasionally scrabbly in the opening movement, as well as in the upwards scalic lead-ins in the same movement of the Schumann, but that's hardly the death of Nelson. Good to hear both works played with such intelligence and with the COE on excellent form.

David Threasher

Nordal

'Choralis'
Adagio. Choralis. Epitafion. Langnætti. Leiðsla
Iceland Symphony Orchestra / Johannes Gustavsson
Ondine ODE1282-2 (67' • DDD)



Jón Nordal (b1926) was an acolyte of Paul Hindemith, whose visit to Darmstadt in 1957 silenced him for nearly a decade. Adding to his creative crisis, Nordal also got wise to the fact that audiences in Iceland weren't responding to his existing works, and by the time he picked up his pen again in 1966 he'd changed direction – lightening his music's polyphony and

using 12-note and other serialist techniques less dogmatically.

But this was no lurch to populism or neo-Romanticism. The piece that saw Nordal return to composition was the *Adagio*, a brittle piece that, like an Icelandic saga, bottles up fierce emotions under its surface. The composer exploits the rootlessness that was a theoretical tenet of atonality even when his music offers a pained, pleading melody.

The latter are examples of Nordal's lyrical expressionism, but the sense of desolation in the *Adagio* – of something sketched, like Sibelius's Fourth – is a mainstay of the composer's orchestral style and characterises *Choralis*. There's a different sort of inertia in *Langnætti*, the most active and tangible work here, and it seems to me founded on the idea of the pregnant gesture. Nordal proves as introspective as ever.

Leiðsla, meanwhile, exists in a semi-meditative state that is punctured as elements rise to the surface. It ends with consonance, on a teetering, icy major chord. *Epitafion* uses an ostinato to create an inexorable tread but the feeling, intriguingly, is of that tread turning in on itself and moving us nowhere; by the end, we sink deeper into the black earth courtesy of evocative low strings. The Iceland Symphony Orchestra offers eloquence, focus and quality solos but this is some of the most unforgivingly desolate music I've heard – what you get when an Icelander decides it's time to broaden his appeal. **Andrew Mellor**

Prokofiev

Violin Concertos³ – No 1, Op 19; No 2, Op 63.

Solo Violin Sonata, Op 115

Vadim Gluzman vn **Estonian National**

Symphony Orchestra / Neeme Järvi

BIS BIS2142 (60' • DDD/DSD)



Like James Ehnes before him, Vadim Gluzman has now set down all Prokofiev's major works for solo violin, albeit spread over separate releases; the Ehnes recordings arrived as a single two-disc package. The readings are nicely differentiated, so you might just need both. Where the Canadian violinist deploys his immaculate technique with discretion and favours a certain interpretative restraint, the itinerant Gluzman has more extrovert instincts as befits an Isaac Stern discovery, even taking risks with the perfect finish of his sound. For some listeners it will be sheer gain that he draws such ripe, old-



Vladimir Gluzman: a feisty storyteller in Prokofiev's violin concertos with Neeme Järvi and the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra on BIS

world sonority from a famous violin once played by Leopold Auer. In the two concertos, the BIS sound team capture the instrument with startling fidelity in what sounds like a sizeable hall. Less happily, the orchestra is sometimes relegated to a mistier accompanimental role. Darting forwards with apparent spontaneity, Gluzman is as feisty a storyteller as any I've heard in the feminine, fairy-tale D major Concerto (No 1). Prokofiev's more delicate invention is perhaps less well served. The multi-miking of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra in Shlomo Mintz's once highly rated concerto pairing under Claudio Abbado might be thought intrusive today but does provide cleanly etched woodwind lines.

Elsewhere the boot is on the other foot, especially if you find the likes of Ehnes insufficiently heart-on-sleeve. Gluzman's all-out style is ideally suited to the beefier, proto-Soviet idiom of the Second Concerto. The finale is rightly apolitical, a joyous romp for a great virtuoso. And it's capped by a positively explosive account of the Sonata for solo violin, which certainly has you forgetting its origins as a pedagogical exercise for massed ranks of student violinists. Obtained in a German

venue, the rendition has a more individualistic character than Viktoria Mullova's recent account. Then again, you might find Gluzman's feverish commitment and insistent dazzle becoming too much of a good thing before the end of this still rather special hybrid SACD.

David Gutman

Concertos – selected comparisons:

Mintz, Chicago SO, Abbado (4/84) (DG) 479 5882*

Ehnes, BBC PO, Noseda (10/13) (CHAN) CHAN10787

Sonata – selected comparison:

Mullova (10/15) (ONYX) ONYX4142

Prokofiev

Symphonies – No 6, Op 111; No 7, Op 131

Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra / James Gaffigan

Challenge Classics (CC72714 (73' • DDD/DSD)



Here is the second release in James Gaffigan's projected Prokofiev symphony cycle, a series that suddenly finds itself one among many. It has many fine qualities even if the poised, somewhat cautious music-making eschews Soviet-era rawness.

The Sixth is at once the greatest and the most ambiguous of Prokofiev's seven essays in the form. None of the others operates on such a plane of harmonic complexity and thematic interdependence yet, at the same time, none so directly channels personal pain and political reality. Most conductors jump one way or the other. Less than squeaky-clean in a recently reissued performance captured some in Prague 20 years after the work's premiere, Evgeny Mravinsky is hyper-intense, projecting disquiet and discontinuity. Gaffigan prefers soft-focus glowering, emphasising instead the music's contemplative, philosophical aspect, at least until the closing stages of the finale. Here the return of the first movement's plaintive chant-like theme prompts a real paroxysm of grief, audibly encouraged from the podium. The final bars are then taken at a canter as indicated in the score, although Mravinsky, Neeme Järvi, Vladimir Ashkenazy, Valery Gergiev, Kirill Karabits and others opt for a more *emotionally authentic* slow grinding of gears.

The Seventh used to be considered slight and sunny, an impression boosted by the happy ending Prokofiev tacked on

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy
 Concerto for violin and orchestra op.64
 Robert Schumann
 Violin Concerto WoO 23
 Carolin Widmann, violin
 Chamber Orchestra of Europe

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 28 Oct. **Cambridge** / Corn Exchange / 30 Oct. **Shrewsbury**
 Theatre Seven / 6 Nov. **Oxford** Sheldonian Theatre
 9 Nov. **Dublin** / Christ Church Cathedral / 10 Nov. **Limerick**
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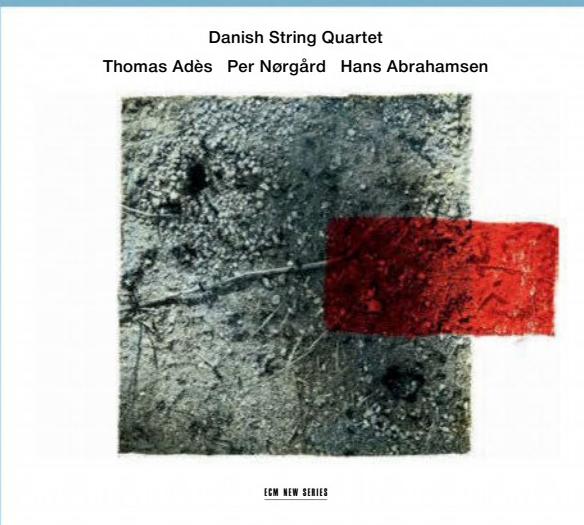


Arvo Pärt
 The Deer's Cry
 Vox Clamantis
 Jaan-Eik Tulve

The Deer's Cry / Von Angesicht zu Angesicht
 Alleluia-Tropus / Virgencita / Veni creator / Drei
 Hirtenkinder aus Fátima / And One of the Pharisees
 Da pacem Domine / Most Holy Mother of God
 Sei gelobt, du Baum / Habitare fratres in unum
 Summa / Gebet nach dem Kanon

CD 4812449

Arvo Pärt The Deer's Cry Vox Clamantis



Danish String Quartet
 Works by
 Thomas Adès Per Nørgård Hans Abrahamsen
 Concerts
 11 Sept. **London** Wigmore Hall
 13 Sept. **Wimbourne** St. Giles House
 11 Nov. **Halifax** Square Chapel Centre

CD 4812385

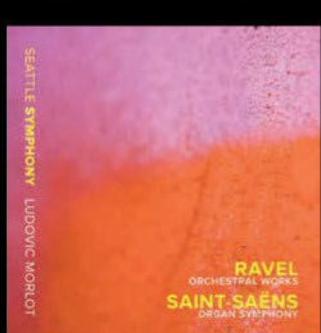
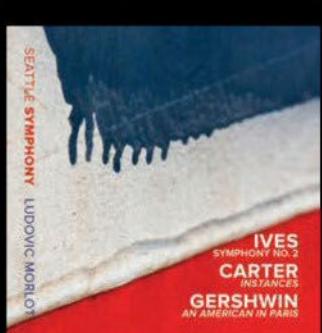
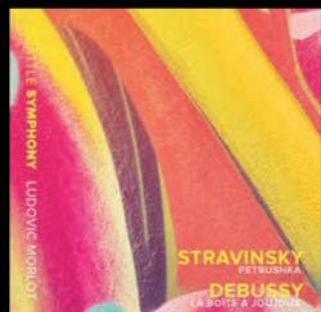
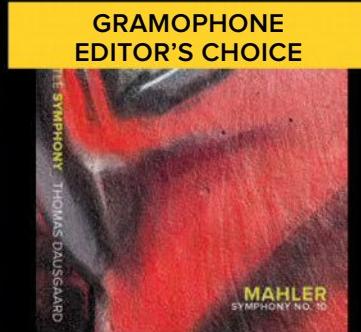


Frode Haltli
 Air
 Frode Haltli, accordion
 Trondheim Soloists
 Arditti Quartet
 Works by
 Bent Sørensen
 Hans Abrahamsen
 CD 4812802

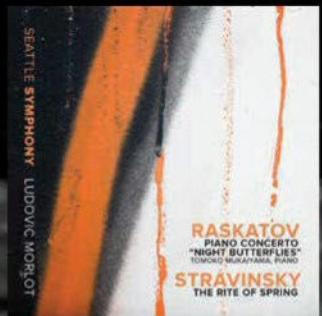
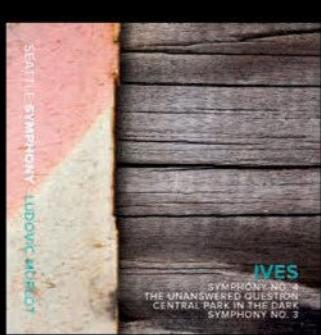
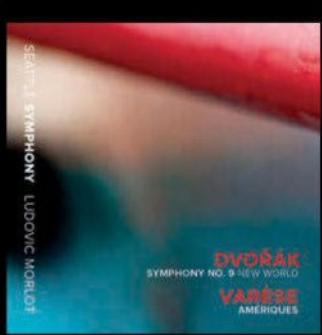
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to appease Stalin's cultural bureaucrats. Gaffigan shuns that optimistic flourish but again seems reluctant to take interpretative risks, which perhaps explains why the second movement's abrupt pay-off falls rather flat. Go to either Gergiev account and you'll find a much broader canvas, albeit without the benefit of such sophisticated surround sound. Challenge Classics' accompanying booklet is full of howlers but the fine detail, richly extended bass and realistically recessed sound stage may be attraction enough.

David Gutman

Selected comparisons – coupled as above:

Gergiev, LSO (6/06) (PHIL) 475 7655PM4

Gergiev, Mariinsky Orch (2/16) (MARI) MAR0577

Symphony No 6 - selected comparison:

Leningrad PO, Mravinsky (8/98^R) (PRAG) DSD350 121

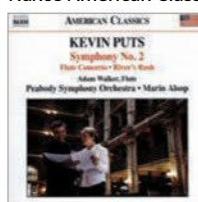
Puts

Flute Concerto^a. River's Rush. Symphony No 2

Adam Walker f/

Peabody Symphony Orchestra / Marin Alsop

Naxos American Classics (M) 8 559794 (57' • DDD)



Kevin Puts's music has an optimism and directness that, at least on its surface, harks back to mid-century American composers like Copland, Harris and Hanson. His Second Symphony (2002) begins in idyllic, glittering, diatonic purity, then unexpectedly shifts to a much darker mood – an illustration, the composer writes, of the ‘paradigmatic shift’ following 9/11. Yet it’s a surprisingly uneventful work given the tragic nature of its inspiration. Puts seems more concerned with establishing moods and mixing colours – which he does expertly, by the way – than with formulating a musical argument. It’s like a film score, in that sense. So, rather than feeling compelled to follow particular threads and patterns, one can simply allow the music to guide one’s wandering thoughts.

The brightly coloured Flute Concerto (2013) clearly comes from the same pen, though it is far more traditional in its musical rhetoric. Most of the first movement and much of the finale are developed from a sweet, folk-like snippet of a tune heard at the very beginning. It’s light, playful music without much emotional complication. The central slow movement is the concerto’s beating heart: a kaleidoscopic, free-form variation on the *Andante* from Mozart’s K467 Piano Concerto. Puts amplifies the pathos in

Mozart’s well-known work while adding his own, peculiarly American commentary. LSO principal Adam Walker plays the solo part with exquisite grace and purity of tone, and Marin Alsop elicits an impressively polished performance from Peabody’s student orchestra, despite some occasional strain and thinness in the strings.

The programme also includes *River’s Rush* (2004), a slightly rambling cinematographic tone-poem that often sounds like Wagner channelled through Adams and John Williams. Indeed, some passages (at 8'04", for instance) could easily be edited seamlessly into a *Star Wars* soundtrack. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

Rachmaninov · Balakirev

Balakirev Tamara

Rachmaninov Symphony No 1, Op 13

London Symphony Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

LSO Live (M) LSO0784 (61' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Barbican, London,

February 19, 2015



‘Vengeance is mine, I shall repay’ is grimly inscribed on the opening page of Rachmaninov’s First Symphony. Each movement opens with a doom-laden four-note motif, and doom certainly surrounded the symphony’s birth. Its 1897 premiere, conducted by Glazunov (who was probably drunk), was a disaster. César Cui bitterly criticised it, likening it to a musical depiction of the seven plagues of Egypt. Rachmaninov’s confidence was shot to pieces to the extent that he was unable to compose anything large-scale until his Second Piano Concerto in 1901. He intended to revise it, but when he emigrated from Russia in 1918, the score was left behind.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Valery Gergiev’s tenure as Principal Conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra was at its strongest in Russian repertoire and this release completes a superb Rachmaninov symphony cycle gradually released on LSO Live. It’s a taut, gripping account, Gergiev often pushing the accelerator harder than Mariss Jansons and Mikhail Pletnev in their more expansive Russian recordings. Strings dig in hard but are also capable of sugary swooning and sighing, with some lovely muted playing in the *Larghetto*. The LSO brass swagger infectiously in the bombastic finale, and demonic forces are at play in the cataclysmic tam-tam clashes in the symphony’s closing bars. The weighty

recording has great presence, though it also captures Gergiev’s familiar podium gurgles and groans.

The disc is completed with Mily Balakirev’s sultry tone-poem *Tamara*, recorded at the same Barbican concert in a feverish performance sometimes lacking a little finesse. However, the opening scene ripples with sensual anticipation as the princess Tamara (from Mikhail Lermontov’s poem) entices passing travellers from her tower overlooking the gorge. Balakirev in oriental style is always fun and this is a welcome, if bruising encounter. **Mark Pullinger**

Rachmaninov – selected comparisons:

St Petersburg PO, Jansons

(4/99^R) (EMI/WARN) 500885-2 or 2564 62782-7

Russian Nat Orch, Pletnev

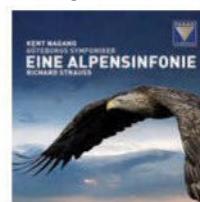
(10/00) (DG) 463 075-2GH or 477 9505GB4

R Strauss

Eine Alpensinfonie, Op 64

Gothenburg Symphony Orchestra / Kent Nagano

Faroa (F) B108091 (51' • DDD)



The booklet-note for this release makes some bold claims regarding Kent

Nagano’s account of *Eine Alpensinfonie* with his Gothenburg orchestra. It speaks of a ‘new approach’, one that avoids the ‘bombastic’ and is built on ‘the long and searching work orchestra and conductor had gone through together’.

It’s probably best to gloss over what this seems to imply about other recordings in the catalogue, but it certainly reflects the analytical ear Nagano brings to the score, allied to logic, coherence and impressive technical security. There are plenty of details to be heard, too, not least the individual strands of the blanket of darkness that Strauss throws over proceedings at the very start.

But while this focus on clarity has a lot going for it, it gives us only one side of this most multifaceted of symphonic pictures; surface brilliance – even, indeed, that occasional bit of bombast – is surely also an integral part. Here, with trumpets that tend towards reticence, we get little sense of the thrill of the ‘Sunrise’, and subsequent moments that strive for the sublime (in the original sense) are tamed. There’s a lack of tension at the end of ‘Vision’, for example, a slight shortage of exhilaration at the summit, and the storm feels a little reined in; the corollary of it all is that the artist’s struggle in the face of nature, which according to Strauss lies at the work’s



London Symphony Orchestra
LSO Live

Mendelssohn

Symphonies Nos 1 & 4

Sir John Eliot Gardiner

London Symphony Orchestra

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The Guardian

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The Sunday Times



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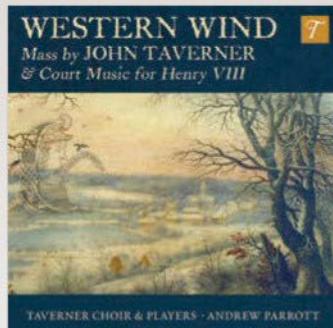
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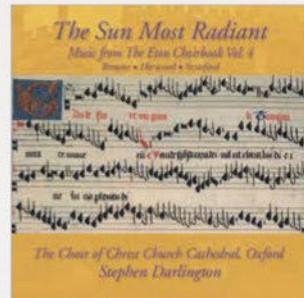
AV 2352

Western Wind: Mass by
John Taverner & Court
Music for Henry VIII

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— Gramophone, Editor's Choice

NEW RELEASES

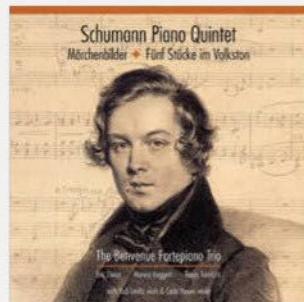
**The Sun Most Radiant:
Music from the Eton Choirbook, Vol. 4**
John Browne • William Horwood • William Stratford



AV 2359

On their fourth volume of **The Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford** and director **Stephen Darlington** give glorious accounts of 15th-century English sacred music including first recordings of works by John Browne and William Horwood.

**Schumann: Piano Quintet,
Märchenbilder, Fünf Stücke im Volkston**



AV 2365

With crystalline textures and drawing room intimacy, **The Benvenue Fortepiano Trio** and friends continue to explore Schumann's chamber music, including the capstone of the composer's chamber output, his *Piano Quintet*.



'Playing of heart-warming sincerity': Arabella Steinbacher offers a selection of favourite showpieces on Pentatone

heart, is underplayed, the warm glow of sunset in the closing pages coming across as unearned. Farao's engineering plays its part too: though remarkably detailed, it is also short on sparkle and brilliance.

Admirers of this score will be interested in Nagano's serious, intelligent take on it – and this release is apparently just the first in a series of Strauss orchestral works from conductor and orchestra on the label. There are other accounts, though, that offer a fuller, richer picture of this fascinating score, Karajan's classic DG recording among them. **Hugo Shirley**

*Selected comparison:
BPO, Karajan (12/81^B, 6/93^R) (DG) 439 017-2GHS*

Fantasies, Rhapsodies & Daydreams

Massenet Thaïs - Méditation **Ravel** Tzigane
Saint-Saëns Havanaise, Op 83. Introduction et Rondo capriccioso, Op 28 **Sarasate**
Zigeunerweisen, Op 20 **Vaughan Williams**
The Lark Ascending **Waxman** Carmen Fantasie
Arabella Steinbacher v/v Monte Carlo
Philharmonic Orchestra / Lawrence Foster
Pentatone F PTC5186 536 (74' • DDD/DSD)



Were someone to ask me to suggest a disc to introduce them to the violin, I might well steer them in the direction of this one. It's a selection of much-loved (some might say hackneyed) warhorses that mixes the thrilling (Waxman, Sarasate, Saint-Saëns) with the serene (Vaughan Williams, Massenet). The 'three Bs' can wait till later.

That is not to say, were one recommending to the friend the best version of each piece, that any of Arabella Steinbacher's would be first choice. For a start, she has Jascha Heifetz to contend with in Waxman's fiendish *Carmen Fantasie* (RCA et al – so much better than Sarasate's ubiquitous alternative). And she is partnered by Lawrence Foster, as reliable as he is unexciting. Listen to the difference in the opening page of the score between the newcomers and Heifetz with (the underrated) Donald Voorhees, let alone

the coda. Their comparative timings (11'41" against Heifetz's 9'30") say a lot.

Another rival for Steinbacher is Nicola Benedetti and her similarly titled disc (DG, A/09), which has five of the same tracks, one of which is Sarasate's *Zigeunerweisen*. Benedetti finds a richer, more resonant tone for the first part, but Steinbacher scores heavily with the corny 'Take me home, oh mother take me home' section, managing to take the curse off it with playing of heart-warming sincerity. She chooses to play the repeat of the finale's third section *sul ponticello* for some reason, producing a vinegary few seconds.

I rather like the way she pushes on in the central section of *The Lark Ascending* – there is plenty of time for meditative musing elsewhere (Benedetti's is 1'20" slower) – and it cleverly elides into the beginning of Saint-Saëns's *Havanaise*. This, the *Introduction and Rondo capriccioso* (dedicated to Sarasate) and Ravel's *Tzigane* are given excellent but not exceptional performances. The standout performance comes between them: the *Méditation* from *Thaïs* is done with breathtaking beauty, a turn-on for any newcomer to the violin. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Schoenberg's Gurrelieder

Conductor **Edward Gardner** discusses this song-cycle-turned-melodrama with Peter Quantrill

Time and place are perfect, almost ordained. Sitting on the terrace of Edward Gardner's house in North London, we have a wood-dove or its near relative chirping over the fence. The conductor has just received from Chandos the first edit of his new *Gurrelieder* recording, made with the Bergen Philharmonic during his first concerts as Chief Conductor. 'The editing process is so strange. You've moved on as a person. Your brain doesn't remember exactly what you did, it recalls the experience of doing it.' To cap it all, he is steeling himself to open *Tristan und Isolde* the following day at ENO.

The quotations in *Gurrelieder* are obvious enough, but Gardner is more interested in Schoenberg's preternatural absorption of the Wagnerian aesthetic itself in setting Jens Peter Jacobsen's retelling of the myth of King Waldemar. The king's adulterous love for Tove is punished by her murder and his own half-life as a spirit condemned to roam the Danish countryside. The Forest Murmurs of *Siegfried* are woven into the seascape of the cantata's Prelude, with an opening that should feel as though 'it's been there for eternity. It's hard to achieve' – especially with the tension of a momentous event which is inevitably generated by *Gurrelieder* in concert. 'You need to capture the dewdrops in the winds while keeping the line, and without making it too obvious.'

Picking our way through the Universal Edition score, we're both freshly astounded by the genius of the twenty-something, self-taught Schoenberg – evident not only in the orchestration (completed in 1911), so admired and copied by composers ever since, but in the pacing and organisation of the whole, vast sequence of song-cycle-turned-melodrama, for which composition began in 1900. 'I see the three parts separately,' remarks Gardner. 'There's a brilliance to the narrative momentum to Part 3 which you can lock into. Part 1 is more disparate, like the first act in a lot of the world's great operas where we're grappling to set something up – in Wagner, and *Götterdämmerung* in particular. But Part 3 is a journey.'

Schoenberg specified his tempi with typical diligence, though later part-disowned them. They are, says Gardner, 'pretty good'. One of the more impractical metronome marks comes with Waldemar's second song, at a precipitate $\text{minim}=112$. 'I'm at 90, not far off. It's stressful for the orchestra, the way it swings between two and three in a bar, and there's so much detail that they're trying to play well. I did a bit of *Hauptstimme* work, saying to the players, "Look



Immersive *Gurrelieder*: Edward Gardner listens back during the recording sessions

how everything fits in with the gallop in the bass. It's a beast, this song, but you just have to get on the back of the horse."

The many-sided nature of Part 1 is caught in a nutshell by the immediate transition to Tove's song. 'We worked for days on getting the orchestra's testosterone level down because you have to play this like you're the most laidback Viennese cafe orchestra. It's a Lehár waltz, with an effervescence in the high winds. Schoenberg's work as an orchestrator and a copyist in that field certainly contributed to the colour of this music. It's music of its time and music of its people.'

That's a remarkable statement, if you don't know Schoenberg or *Gurrelieder*, but Tchaikovsky's tone-poems and what Gardner calls 'the pale smile' of Schumann's Lieder-writing left an imprint on Part 1, and the conductor points to Mahler's *Das klagende Lied* as 'a bedfellow of this piece – that sort of epic fable in music, which is in itself Wagnerian'. We look at the Wood-Dove's lamenting ballad, in which each verse has a different character, one of them a half-remembered miniature march which, as Gardner notes, owes something to 'Der Tambour'sell' from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn*. 'When the last verse starts with the evocation of bells, that harmonic simplicity reminds me of Elgar. It's as if a duvet comes over



The historical view

WH Hadow

The Musical Quarterly, January 1915

The style of Schoenberg's *Gurrelieder* is that of advanced modern polyphony in which every part is real, no eye can possibly take in a whole page at once, and the chances of hearing the music may perhaps occur twice in a lifetime.

Egon Wellesz

The Musical Quarterly, January 1916

The *Gurrelieder* are a drama of love like *Tristan und Isolde* or *Pelléas et Mélisande*. It is impossible to speak of the beauty and the mastery of art in the last chorus, or to attempt to describe them to one who has not heard them.

Sir Simon Rattle

Philadelphia Inquirer, January 2000

Occasionally, you have to trim the orchestra down to let the singers through. Otherwise, it's like a slugfest. What's interesting is what an incredible pleasure it is for everybody – even though it's not an easy piece to play.

the whole orchestra. The modulation at figure 87 is an incredibly subtle gesture in a gargantuan work; I like Schoenberg's instruction that you shouldn't push, because it's really hard not to. You know what's coming' – and what arrives is an orchestral shriek 'like a rip in the history of music' which for once uses the full force of this vast orchestra.

Marshalling those forces must be a challenge, I suggest. 'Because the music is so dense, if you want to give space to the way a phrase is turned it takes a fraction longer for the reaction to come. But when 24 first violins really play *pianissimo* – we had the proper string-band sizes – there's nothing like it.'

Gardner waxes lyrical over the colour at the opening of Part 3 with flageolet double basses under harps. 'Schoenberg writes these hairpins so that the sound blooms from over here and comes out on the other side of the stage.' Even so, there are points in the score where surely the conductor is more like a traffic cop – such as the male choruses? 'Yes. And they're almost impossible to balance, with the "Hollas!" and the iron chains going crazy. But the weird thing is that there's no bullshit in this score.' Has Schoenberg done more of the work for you than it might at first appear? 'Absolutely. You have to learn the notes and the textures, and understand what colours you need, but after that you're feeling a lot of it in your bones. Conscious analysis doesn't happen while you're conducting it.'

The subsequent cabaret scene with Klaus the Jester is the most modern-sounding section of *Gurrelieder*, and clearly a favourite passage for Gardner. 'It is fun to conduct, but hard. The rubato should feel spontaneous but of course it's not. We're all knackered by the time we get there – it's like having to do a tap dance in the middle of a large underwater ballet. We got Chandos to close-mike it. Everything shines on a Chandos recording, that's why I love working with Ralph [Couzens], but I wanted this passage to sound as though you were hearing it out of an old transistor radio!'

'When the last verse of the Wood-Dove's ballad starts with the evocation of bells, it's as if a duvet comes over the orchestra'

Waldemar is finally banished with a curse, yet *Gurrelieder* ends in a blaze of glory. The trajectory should jar, but Gardner observes how it begins and ends in light. 'I reconcile the narrative as something bigger than one man's journey. Wagner already does that, in *Tristan* Act 2, where the specificity of text becomes unimportant. The music has all the answers – it guides you.'

The new character of 'The Wild Hunt of the Summer Wind' supplies the answer. 'It's upon you before you know it. The passage with The Speaker is complex and comes at you at great pace. You need to achieve the soloistic lightness of *Pierrot Lunaire*. It's the most complex part of the score in terms of what to convey. At figure 85 there's a passage like music theatre – Thomas Allen [The Speaker] and I call it Blackpool Pier.'

Gardner expresses sympathy for 'the poor female chorus,' who are on stage for 100 minutes before greeting the sunrise. 'They have so little to sing but it's so hard.' And in the midst of the clamour, Schoenberg ambitiously scores for *divisi* cellos, but, the conductor maintains, 'you can still make that happen'. He continues: '*Gurrelieder* could feel disjointed or overblown, it should feel derivative, but it never does. To stand in front of this music – there's nothing like it.' **G**

Edward Gardner's *Gurrelieder* recording is reviewed next month

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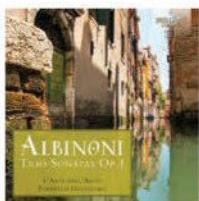


Richard Wigmore listens to the Chiaroscuros in Haydn's Op 20: *'Finales are especially good, whether in the airy, scherzando grace the Chiaroscuro bring to No 2's fugue'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**

Albinoni

Twelve Trio Sonatas, Op 1

L'Arte dell'Arco / Federico Guglielmo *vn*
Brilliant Classics (S) ② 94789 (88' • DDD)



The fact that so very few recordings exist of Albinoni's Op 1 Trio Sonatas feels like a

strange quirk of history, given the popularity of some of his other instrumental works. As it is, though, L'Arte dell'Arco's offering becomes only the second complete recorded set, the other being Parnassi Musici's 2001 recording for CPO. It marks the beginning of a new series of Albinoni's complete instrumental music for Brilliant Classics, and if it's the standard-setter then we're in for some great music, at a budget price.

Albinoni published these trio sonatas in 1694; that's 14 years before Corelli's own Op 1 Trio Sonatas and 11 years before his fellow Venetian Vivaldi's Op 1 set. With those facts in your head these will yield no stylistic surprises. As with their recordings of Tartini violin concertos (Dynamic), L'Arte dell'Arco have opted for a modern A=440 tuning (Venetians appear to have tuned comparatively high against the Baroque norm), and on the whole their music-making gives the earlier Parnassi Musici recording a run for its money, with a crisp, vibrant, semi-dirty sound and a lucid balance through which the theorbo pokes delightfully. Violinists Federico Guglielmo and Glaucio Bertagnin are zingy and stringy of tone, with warmth aplenty too, and some subtly ear-tickling ornamentation. Cellist Francesco Galligioni dances the bass-line along (try No 2's *Vivace*), and there's some immensely musical underpinning from keyboardist Roberto Loreggiani.

It's not a clean sweep of brilliance, I should say. For the most part, the violins make for a beautifully consonant partnership but there is the occasional intonation lapse and unpleasant scratch. There's also a whiff of budget about the production values at times: listen in to the

ends of tracks and you'll hear the break in ambience (it's recorded in Padua's Abbazia di Carceri d'Este). Still, these are quibbles which at this price are not worth worrying about. **Charlotte Gardner**

JS Bach

Sonatas - No 1, BWV525; No 3, BWV527; No 4, BWV528; No 5, BWV529; No 6, BWV530
Jan Van Hoecke *recs Jovanka Marville* *hpd/fp*
Alpha (F) ALPHA237 (63' • DDD)



Bach's output abounds with instances of his revisiting older works to arrange them for different forces, so there's an extent to which his compositions can legitimately be seen as fair game for modern-day Baroque players on the prowl for fresh repertoire.

So here come Jan Van Hoecke and Jovanka Marville, transcribing the organ sonatas BWV525 and 527-30 for recorder and keyboard, and in commendably scholarly fashion. For instance, their solution to the woodwind-unfriendly wide leaps of BWV528 was to retrace Bach's own compositional steps to find an earlier version with narrower leaps. There's also Van Hoecke's choice of recorders; these are not flamboyant sonatas, so the decision to stick to the woodpigeon-esque softness of alto and tenor instruments feels apt.

There's a 'but' coming, and it's in the shape of the fortepiano, modelled on a 1749 Silbermann model Bach is said to have known, which replaces the harpsichord for BWV527 and 528. On paper this rather appealed for the colouristic interest it might bring. However, repeated listens leave me of the opinion that the writing in these sonatas simply isn't an idiomatic fit for the instrument; walking basses sound heavy, while busier right-hand passages sound stodgy (BWV528's *Allegro*) or, when the pedal is employed, full of notes bleeding uncomfortably into each other (BWV528's *Adagio*).



Jeremy Nicholas on piano quintets by Rózycki and Friedman: *'Try the first movement and its delicious second subject with more than just a hint of Der Rosenkavalier'* ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 73**

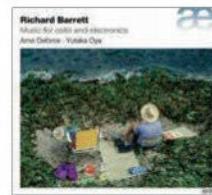
Still, I wouldn't want to write off the whole disc on account of a pedesome fortepiano. At the very least it's a debating point, and the other three sonatas with harpsichord come off beautifully.

Charlotte Gardner

Barrett

'Music for cello and electronics'
Blattwerk. *life-form. nacht und träume*^a

Arne Deforce *vc* ^a**Yutaka Oya** *pf*
Richard Barrett, Centre Henri Pousseur *elecs*
Aeon (M) ② AECD1648 (110' • DDD)



Shortly after Boulez's death, Richard Barrett published a brief 'Boulez est mort' article online. While for many the French composer represents the acme of arch-modernism, for Barrett he stands for the gradual dilution, if not betrayal of that project. It's a viewpoint that helps indicate the stylistic tenor of Barrett's music on this uncompromising, vivifying album.

Barrett's cello writing eschews the exclusivity of traditional parameters, such as pitch, harmony and melody, for an expanded topography of sound wherein many micro-physical attributes take more importance. Most of the 10 sections of *life-form* (2011-12), for example, require different scordatura, and the electronics often act as 'environments' in which the solo instrument's sound material evolves. This combination of non-idiomatic cello writing and electronics makes for a wildly complex, coruscating blaze of flashes and glitches, though the monumental work is not without lulls or the odd classical gesture.

Common to all three works is imagery from the natural world – less alpine lake than trans-human biomorphism. If the title of *nacht und träume* (2004-08) and the added presence of the equal-tempered piano suggest an embrace of music history, it is within the context of a menacingly surrealistic dream wherein history is pulled



The Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen record music by Ole Buck for Dacapo (review page 69)

apart. *Blattwerk* (1998–2002) evokes the multidimensional cross-section of a leaf falling through the air; the intensity of the results is at times disconcerting.

Belgian cellist Arne Deforce has collaborated with Barrett since the late 1990s in opening up new territory for the instrument and he puts in energetic, exhilarating performances here. An intelligent essay by John Fallas helps place the music in perspective and the album on the whole makes a compelling case not only for the boldness of Barrett's vision but also for its clarity. **Liam Cagney**

Brahms · Herzogenberg

Brahms String Quartet No 1, Op 51 No 1

Herzogenberg Three String Quartets, Op 42

Minguet Quartet

CPO © ② CPO777 084-2 (129' • DDD)

Brahms

Brahms Two String Quartets, Op 51

New Zealand Quartet

Naxos M 8 573433 (68' • DDD)



Heinrich von Herzogenberg dedicated the three quartets of his Op 42 (1884) to Brahms, his friend and musical idol. Hearing any of them alongside Brahms's C minor Quartet, which fills out the Minguet's two-disc set, is instructive as well as more than a little bit unfair. Like Brahms, Herzogenberg's language is rooted in motivic concision and developmental variation – and his technical facility is considerable – but there's nothing here that remotely approaches the unwavering emotional grip and feeling of inevitability in Brahms's work. Still, if you're attracted to well-wrought 19th-century chamber music, these are worth a listen, particularly as the Minguet Quartet are such passionately committed advocates.

The first quartet of the Op 42 group, in G minor, is by far the most satisfying. There's a delightful air of lilting melancholy wafting through the first movement, and although the formal structure is daringly expansive, Herzogenberg manages to mould his wealth of ideas into a reasonably coherent whole. The slow movement is a series of variations on a theme that seems dully predictable at first but is relieved by an accretion of increasingly inventive detail. A tuneful and metrically playful scherzo is

followed by a high-spirited, folk-inflected finale that's only slightly blemished by an overlong coda.

There are charming moments in the two other quartets of the set, though these come conspicuously fewer and farther between. It's not only the melodic material that's less inspired but the composer's sense of proportion seems off, too, so that some of the movements are prolix and prone to meandering. Then, just when your patience begins to wear thin, there's a delicious dab of instrumental colour, or a demonstration of contrapuntal legerdemain that reminds you of Herzogenberg's worth.

At first glance, I thought it unwise of CPO to offer yet another recording of Brahms's C minor Quartet but I'm happy to have been wrong. This is a tremendous performance, full of fire and imagination. Listen to how violinist Ulrich Isfort makes the transitional passage in the opening *Allegro* (at 1'50") feel improvisatory without ever losing the essential pulse, or to the heart-achingly sweet, glistening tone of all four players (beginning around 4'13") in the Romanze, and the expressive use of portamento in the swooping lines of the finale.

The New Zealand Quartet benefit from a slightly clearer, richer-sounding recording, yet their interpretation of Op 51 No 1, while genuinely expressive, is far less gripping.

OPERA

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28 May and 3 June 2017



The Schubert Ensemble record a satisfying and rewarding pairing of piano quartets by Chausson and Saint-Saëns

There are standout moments, including some rapturous playing in the Romanze (sample beginning at 3'30", for instance), but overall – and in the companion A minor Quartet, too – leisurely tempi and slack phrasing generate insufficient emotional force. The New Oxford Quartet opt for similarly relaxed pacing in their account of the two Op 51 quartets, yet dig into the music in a way that gets us closer to the music's vulnerable heart. **Andrew Farach-Colton**

*Brahms Op 51 – selected comparisons:
New Oxford Qt (2/16^{US}) (BRIDGEBRIDGE9464*

O Buck

'Sinfonietta Works'
Fiori di ghiaccio. Flower Ornament Music.
A Tree. [Untitled]
Athelas Sinfonietta Copenhagen / Jesper Nordin
Dacapo (F) 8 226589 (59' • DDD)



Ole Buck (b 1945) is one of the only composers to have emerged from Denmark's 20th-century search for 'new simplicity' as a genuine minimalist. He could be described as a Danish Howard

Skempton, both in the penetrating resonance of his very pure music and in the fact that he's never been adequately celebrated in his own country.

Sometimes Buck's music has the busy gait of classic American minimalism and sometimes it gravitates more towards Baltic purity, using just a handful of notes. *Fiori di ghiaccio* (1999) has elements of both. It was written in response to a dream in which the composer opened his curtains to a landscape whitened by snow and ice. The music is intangible but absolutely present, like fog or smoke.

A Tree (1996) suggests in its cleanliness and order (in a literal and tonal sense) why Buck's music has been compared to Japanese drawing. Here Buck speaks of tonality as the trunk of a tree – sustained wind chords – while flowering activity in other instruments represents its branches: blossoming, modernity, progress.

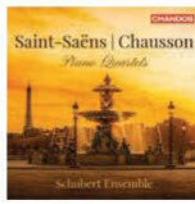
Flower Ornament Music digs deeper and deeper with its cyclic repetitions – up to a point. I feel the concentration is lost when the work becomes slightly cluttered by percussion sounds and then fragments, before emerging into something more like the urban American minimalism our ears know so well. In other words, the

meditative spell of the Zen Buddhism that inspired it evaporates.

[*Untitled*] (2010) is a sort of *Pictures at an Exhibition* in which the pictures remain unknown to us – abstract elements woven into the music's evolving, intensifying patterns. The Athelas Sinfonietta's playing is suitably hypnotic, with beautiful solos and a sense of the music's haze despite a close recording. Resonant and fascinating music from a composer who knows himself and his art. **Andrew Mellor**

Chausson · Saint-Saëns

Chausson Piano Quartet, Op 30
Saint-Saëns Piano Quartet, Op 41
Schubert Ensemble
Chandos (F) CHAN10914 (68' • DDD)



'It would be hard to find a more vivid demonstration of the variety of French music-making in the last quarter of the 19th century than the two quartets on this disc.' Thus Roger Nichols in his exemplary booklet for this release (exemplary, that is, as long as you are up

to speed with the Phrygian mode). As he observes so elegantly, neither of them ‘conforms wholly to the casual cliché of French music as being light, graceful, charming and anti anything that might be classed as intellectual’.

So a satisfying and rewarding pairing in superb sound (Potton Hall with Jeremy Hayes and Jonathan Cooper). The performances of both are, as you would expect from an ensemble that has had these works in its repertoire for many years, as fine in their attention to detail as is their structural grasp and stylistic assurance. If it is this pairing that attracts you, then there is no competition. If, however, your main interest is Saint-Saëns, then I would go for the Nash Ensemble’s survey of his major chamber works (Hyperion, 7/05) featuring the incomparable piano of Ian Brown. He brings an altogether lighter touch to the texture, which I prefer to the newcomer, especially in the second movement (here the Schubert Ensemble’s William Howard is almost Brahmsian) and which comes into its own in the fleet-fingered, Mendelssohnian third-movement scherzo.

The Chausson Quartet, written some 22 years later in 1897, really deserves to be better known. Again, if Chausson is your chief concern, then I should opt for the comprehensive Decca collection of Chausson’s music (including his more celebrated *Concert* for violin, piano and string quartet) with Pascal Rogé and the Ysaÿe Quartet; if you want just these two Chausson works – *Concert* and *Quartet* – then Hyperion is your destination again with Pascal Devoyon and the Chilingirian Quartet (2/98). Paradoxically, though, it is Howard’s playing on the Chandos release that best realises ‘the searching, yearning quality of the writing’ (Nichols again) in glorious music that reflects the influences of César Franck and Richard Wagner.

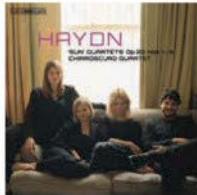
Jeremy Nicholas

Haydn

String Quartets, ‘Sun’, Op 20 – No 1; No 2; No 3

Chiaroscuro Quartet

BIS (F) BIS2158 (75' • DDD/DSD)



North German critics with a humour bypass had taken Haydn to task for ‘the odd mix of the comic and the serious, of the frivolous and the touching’ in his early string quartets, citing also his ‘great ignorance of counterpoint’. If the epoch-making Op 20 quartets of 1772 knocked

the latter charge spectacularly on the head, they also reach new heights of waywardness and inspired eccentricity. The first movement of No 3 is a classic case in point. A world away from the tragic pathos of Mozart in G minor, Haydn here veers unsettlingly between vehemence and ostensibly jolly *buffo*-like fragments. And perhaps with his Berlin and Hamburg critics in mind, he pointedly demonstrated in three of the Op 20 finales that fugue can not only be deadly earnest (in No 5), but also, as in No 2, a vehicle for fun and games. Never before had such contrapuntal virtuosity been deployed with such a nonchalant, playful touch.

If you prefer modern instruments in these essential Haydn works, go for The Lindsays (ASV, 6/98, 7/99) and the more subjectively inflected Doric (Chandos, 12/14). But recordings by the Mosaïques and the London Haydn quartets and now the Chiaroscuro make a compelling case for gut strings and lighter, Classical bows. To over-simplify, the Mosaïques are closest in their phrasing and use of vibrato to a modern-style performance, the London Haydn Quartet have a unique breadth and inwardness, while the Chiaroscuro tend to be fleeter and ‘straighter’ than either. For all their elegance and subtlety of timing, they slightly short-change the pre-Romantic sentiment in the glorious *Poco adagio* of No 3. They lose something, too, in their brisk traversals of the opening movements of Nos 1 (where the London Haydn Quartet’s spaciousness and gentle flexibility seem spot-on) and 2.

There are, though, many rewards elsewhere. Finales are especially good, whether in the airy, *scherzando* grace the Chiaroscuro bring to No 2’s fugue or the new, whimsical nuances when they repeat each half of the teasing finale of No 1. And their quizzical rather than driven approach to the finale of No 3, with pauses unpredictably timed, allies it with the first movement, where the Chiaroscuro play up the music’s disruptive, destabilising aspects. Memorable, too, are their fine line-drawing and acute response to the ebb and flow of harmonic tension in No 1’s *Affetuoso e sostenuto* (repeats, as ever, imaginatively rethought), and their shaping and colouring of the paired middle movements of No 2. In the latter the musette-minuet emerges dazed and weightless into the light after the disintegrating close of the C minor Capriccio – an exquisite moment and a reminder that sensitive gradations of *piano*, *pianissimo* and even (at the enigmatic close of No 3) *ppp* are among the chief strengths of these thoughtful, fine-grained performances. **Richard Wigmore**

Selected comparisons:

Mosaïques Qt (5/93⁸) (NAIV) ▷ E8802
London Haydn Qt (4/11) HYPE) CDA67877

Haydn

Piano Trios – ‘Gypsy Rondo’, HobXV/25; HobXV/26; HobXV/27; HobXV/30

Grieg Trio

Simax (F) PSC1267 (65' • DDD)



This is the hardest sort of disc to write about: good, thoroughly musical playing, yet without the enlivening, illuminating touch that transmutes the enjoyable into the memorable. A litmus test is the finale of the *Gypsy Rondo*. In their determination to keep the music within the confines of the refined salon, the Grieg Trio tame the *Zigeuner* episodes, keeping the tempo steady and muting dynamic contrasts. For the wild abandon of the Hungarian *puszta*, go to the Trio Fontenay (Teldec/Warner, 2/99) or, even better, the unbridled Vienna Piano Trio (Dabringhaus und Grimm).

Here and in the potentially hilarious *Presto* finale of the C major, No 27, the Grieg present Haydn as a gracious, elegantly pigtailed figure rather than the purveyor of subversive mischief evoked by the Viennese group or (in No 27) András Schiff and friends (Decca/Eloquence, 1/96). In the Grieg Trio’s hands No 27’s finale bounces along happily enough. With sharper (and more varied) accents, more vivid dynamic contrasts and sly touches of timing, Schiff and accomplices nail it as a masterpiece of controlled comic mayhem. In the subdued minuet finale of the F sharp minor Trio, No 26 – perhaps Haydn’s melancholy farewell to his lover, Rebecca Schroeter? – the Grieg sound briskly stoical where other groups, including the Florestan (Hyperion, 4/09) and the Kungsbacka (Naxos, 1/12) find more poetry and pathos.

The Grieg are best, I think, in the four slow movements – always justly paced and thoughtfully phrased – and in the magnificent E flat, No 30, one of the best-kept secrets among Haydn’s late trios. While dynamics are still rather flattened (not entirely the fault of the resonant church acoustic), the noble first movement has the requisite breadth, the frequent dips to the minor sensitively inflected. With the cello given its due in the balance, you can savour Haydn’s glorious, wide-ranging bass-lines here and in the deep-toned *Andante*. If you see Haydn as the urbane man-of-the-world

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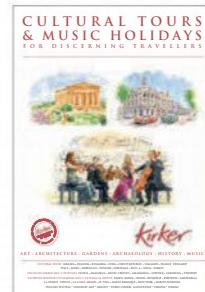
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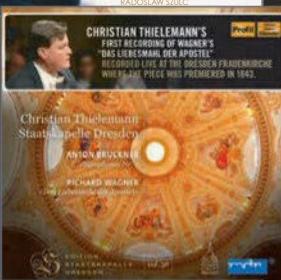
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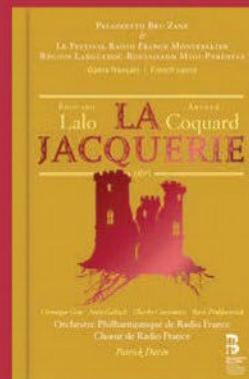
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The Parker Quartet: delectable in a pair of Mendelssohn's string quartets from his Op 44 set

portrayed in the famous painting by John Hoppner, then the Grieg's skilled and civilised performances should give much pleasure. For me, they tend to circumscribe the music's expressive range and, crucially, short-change the animal spirits and sheer impish glee that is surely a crucial part of Haydn's creative persona.

Richard Wigmore

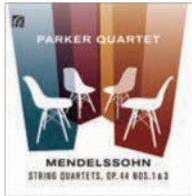
Mendelssohn

String Quartets - No 3, Op 44 No 1;

No 5, Op 44 No 3

Parker Quartet

Nimbus Alliance  NI6327 (62' • DDD)



Boston-based Parker Quartet prove equally compelling in Mendelssohn, refreshingly choosing two quartets from the still-underrated Op 44 set. Earlier this year, I was particularly taken with the Cecilia's pairing of the first and second quartets of the set and this new disc is every bit as striking.

The opening movement of Op 44 No 1 has just the right sense of unfettered exultation, with plenty of warmth without any loss of clarity. Throughout, you're aware of characterful individual contributions within an impeccable ensemble. The Parker are a degree gentler than the Cecilia in this movement, while in the Menuetto they lovingly entwine themselves around Mendelssohn's mellifluous lines. In the slow third movement the Parker are utterly poetic, the first violin a degree more restrained in terms of vibrato than the Cecilia's, while the touches of rubato are unerringly judged. The Leipzig are also very fine here, giving the melody an almost folksy narrative. The Parker take the joyous *Presto* a degree faster than the Cecilia, yet never sound breathless, compared to which the tangily characteristic period-instrument *Eroica* tread a middle ground.

They capture the very different character of Op 44 No 3 equally vividly, relishing the harmonic crunches that spice the first movement. By comparison, the Mandelring are just a touch less subtle in their musical conversation. Throughout, the Parker's reactivity makes for the most engaging

music-making, be it in the slow movement or the scherzo, where they balance drive and play. The immediacy of the Parker's playing is matched by the immediacy of sound and altogether this is a delectable addition to the Mendelssohn quartet discography. **Harriet Smith**

Op 44 No 1 – selected comparisons:

Cecilia Qt (2/16) (ANAL) AN2 9844

Leipzig Qt (MDG) MDG307 1168-2

Eroica Qt (HARM) HMU90 7287

Op 44 No 3 – selected comparison:

Mandelring Qt (1/14) (AUDI) AUDITE92 658

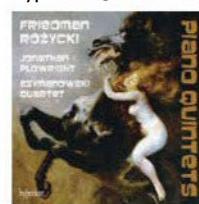
Rózycki · Friedman

Friedman Piano Quintet

Rózycki Piano Quintet, Op 35

Jonathan Plowright pf **Szymanowski Quartet**

Hyperion  CDA68124 (80' • DDD)



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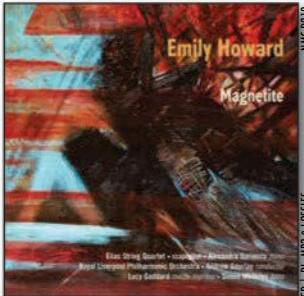
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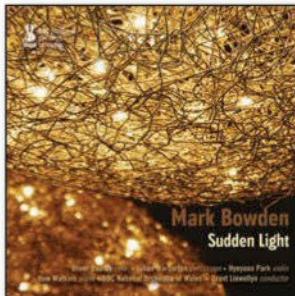
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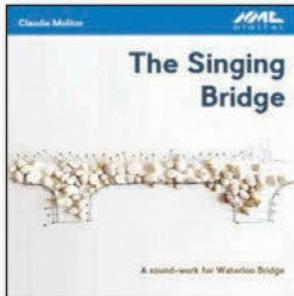
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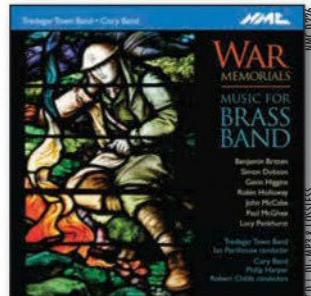
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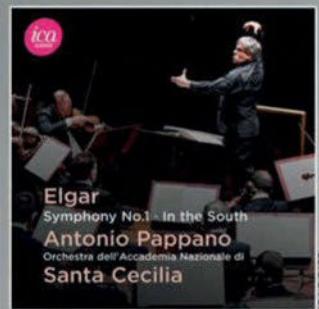
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From Pierre-Jean Tribot (ResMusica June 2015)

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the new recordings of his two piano concertos, which I had the pleasure of welcoming in the February issue. These were played by Jonathan Plowright (overlooked yet again by the BBC Proms this year) and it is this outstanding British pianist in whose debt we are once more for this second Rózicki resurrection. It is imaginatively coupled with another C minor piano quintet by a fellow Pole. A further agreeable link between the two works is that Friedman was the pianist in the second performance (1915) of the Rózicki Quintet.

Rózicki (1883–1953) wrote his work in Paris and Berlin in 1913 but there is no hint of the new music of Europe at that time, rather a throwback to Franck and Brahms working in the shadows of Richard Strauss and Max Reger. In the conventional three movements, awash with powerful themes and original ideas, it lasts a substantial 42 minutes. Who knows, it might even find a life outside the recording studio (which in this case, and not incidentally, was Potton Hall with engineer Ben Connellan and producer Jeremy Hayes, the team responsible for the Rózicki concertos).

If anything, I like the Friedman even more. It was written in 1918, when he was already established as a world-class virtuoso. The piano part, however, is not a virtuoso vehicle, allowing the excellent Szymanowski Quartet to exploit to the full Friedman's civilised five-way conversation. Try the first movement (*Allegro maestoso*) and its delicious second subject with more than just a hint of *Der Rosenkavalier* (Adrian Thomas in his excellent notes agrees that 'in full orchestral garb it might have stepped off the page of a recent score by Richard Strauss'). The second movement (*Larghetto, con somma espressione*) is a theme and seven variations (the final one is a fugue); the 'Epilog' finale begins with a dance and ends quietly after recollections from the first two movements.

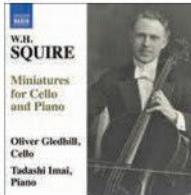
The disc's cover has a wonderful painting by Władysław Podkowiński entitled *Ecstasy*. Very apt. Jeremy Nicholas

Squire

'Miniatures for Cello and Piano'

L'adieu (Romance). Bourrée, Op 24. Canzonetta. Chansonnette, Op 22. Danse orientale. Danse rustique, Op 20 No 5. Elégie. Gavotte humoristique, Op 6. Gondoliera, Op 20 No 2. Harlequinade. Humoresque, Op 26. Madrigal. Mazurka, Op 19 No 4. Minuet, Op 19 No 3. Prière. Romance, Op 5 No 1. Scène de bal, Op 8. Sérénade, Op 15. Tarantella, Op 23. Tzig-Tzig (Danse magyare)

Oliver Gledhill vc **Tadashi Imai** pf
Naxos M 8 571373 (67' • DDD)



First, a declaration of interest. Like anyone who learnt the cello through the ABRSM's exams, the miniatures of WH Squire are part of my youth. So as Tadashi Imai played the introduction to the Romance that opens this disc, I experienced something like a Proustian rush. Cellists, amateur and professional alike, will seize on this collection of 20 of Squire's winsome cello-and-piano miniatures (at least a quarter of them premiere recordings) with delight.

But what about everyone else? Well, this is salon music, pure and simple. As Oliver Gledhill explains in his comprehensive booklet-notes, these pieces were written between 1890 and 1904 as recital items and for teaching purposes. They're genre pieces, with titles like *Harlequinade*, *Scène de bal* and *Danse rustique*: they're about melody and charm, designed to let a passably gifted cellist show what they can do in a congenial setting. Where they transcend genre is in their freshness. Squire never indulges in virtuosity for its own sake – and his melodic gift is modest but surprisingly memorable.

Gledhill clearly loves playing them. You might perhaps ask for a little more shading in his warm, handsome stream of tone, and Imai's piano part is occasionally muffled. But, overall, these are affectionate performances, Gledhill making the most of Squire's signature left-hand slides, throwing off the occasional fireworks (as in the miniature Hungarian rhapsody *Tzig-Tzig*) with delightful insouciance and strumming the pizzicato final chords of the *Humoresque* with a playful wink. Imai is a responsive partner and the pair have an unforced instinct for the ebb and flow of the slower pieces. In short, there's a lot of enjoyment to be had here – and not just for cellists.

Richard Bratby

'Cello Rising'

Antonii Ricercata decima Boccherini Sonatas – G4; G8 Boismortier Sonata II D Gabrielli Sonata in G Galli Sonata III Telemann Sonata, TWV41:D6
Mime Yamahiro Brinkmann vc
Björn Gäfvert hp **Karl Nyhlin** gtr
BIS F BIS2214 (70' • DDD/DSD)



Cellist Mime Yamahiro Brinkmann is regularly to be found performing

with early music ensembles such as La Petite Bande, Bach Collegium Japan and the Drottningholm Baroque Ensemble in Sweden, meaning she's no stranger to the recording studio. This, though, is her first solo disc, ably accompanied by Björn Gäfvert on a French double-manual harpsichord and Karl Nyhlin on a five-course Baroque guitar, and it's a cleverly devised one: a sequential journey from the cello's beginnings as a deep-voiced, mainly accompanimental instrument most likely to be found in cathedrals, through to its Rococo flowering as solo virtuoso instrument with upper-register fireworks. Date-wise, the works stretch from 1687 to 1771.

Two of the three earliest works are solo pieces by Giovanni Battista degli Antonii and Domenico Gabrielli milking the instrument's sonorous depths; pre-dating Bach's solo cello suites by a good 30 years, they're played here with a beguilingly dancing lilt, enriched still further by her varied palette of articulation. Then, although the performances' overall sense of fun occasionally erupts into roughness in moments such as in Boccherini's Sonata in A major, with its fiendish extreme-upper-register finger-twisting central *Allegro*, this does rather fit with the mood. Indeed, sacrilegious to say perhaps, but I'm yet to find a recording of that *Allegro* that's entirely easy on the ear; Andre Navarra comes closer than anyone but on a modern cello, and his piano accompaniment arrangement turns the work into an entirely different musical beast. Meanwhile, Yamahiro Brinkmann demonstrates elsewhere, such as in the B flat major Boccherini's first *Allegro* and in Boismortier's Sonata II in G, that she's more than capable of controlled, fluttering elegance when the notes are coming thick and fast.

Charlotte Gardner

'Duo Sessions'

Halvorsen Passacaglia on a Theme by Handel
Kodály Duo, Op 7 **Ravel** Sonata **Schulhoff** Duo
Julia Fischer vn **Daniel Müller-Schott** vc
Orfeo F C902 161A (65' • DDD)



There's plenty to enjoy here, though Julia Fischer and Daniel Müller-Schott virtually duplicate a programme that Nigel Kennedy and Lynn Harrell put out some years ago for EMI/Warner. As so often is the case, comparisons are instructive. Harrell and

GRAMOPHONE Collector

QUARTETS FOR OUR TIME

Richard Bratby listens to a clutch of releases demonstrating contemporary approaches to the classic medium



'Genuinely mind-expanding': the Kepler Quartet have recorded three of Ben Johnston's works quartets on New World Records

A grand minor-key flourish, and the players of the Arcadia Quartet dig passionately, gutsily into their strings. Yes, it's exactly what it sounds like: the sonata-form first movement of a big, stormy string quartet in four movements, complete with discernible keys, melodies and heart-on-sleeve emotions. This is **Leo Samama's** *Le grand quatuor*, Op 79, and there's nothing particularly startling about it until you read that it was composed in 2011.

A certain type of new music aficionado may find that profoundly shocking. Hence the piece's knowing, only partly ironic title. Composing a full-scale classically structured quartet was, says Samama, the fulfilment of a dream, and he cites Beethoven, Debussy and Tristan Keuris as presiding spirits. Elsewhere on this set the Valerius Ensemble perform a darkly atmospheric Clarinet Quintet

and the Matangi Quartet play a nine-minute *Treuermuziek* that unfolds its melancholy with a quiet eloquence that leaves little doubt that Samama is no mere postmodernist magpie but a composer writing the music he feels he has to write.

Is that really so controversial, in 2016? As recently as 1983 Paul Griffiths could plausibly write (in *The String Quartet*, Thames & Hudson) that Bartók's were the only quartets since Beethoven to hold an undisputed place in the repertoire. Since then, there's been a step-change. Bartók is now as familiar as Mendelssohn, amateurs play Shostakovich and young ensembles make their reputations with Dutilleux and Tippett. This hasn't just been a revolution of technique but one of outlook too. Capital-M Modernism is only one language among many. The 21st-century string quartet is a world of boundless stylistic variety and today's

performers are superbly equipped to explore it.

The results – as on the Kepler Quartet's latest disc of quartets by the American microtonalist **Ben Johnston** – can be genuinely mind-expanding. This recording of Johnston's String Quartet No 7 (1984) is the first-ever performance (let alone recording) of a work that until last year was believed to be unplayable. Reputedly the most difficult string quartet ever written, its finale comprises a 16-minute sequence of microtonal variations whose mind-boggling structural complexity is belied by the intense concentration, poise and sincerity of the Keplers' playing. This may not be an easy listen for those unfamiliar with Johnston's music; nonetheless, simply listening is probably the best approach.

Because – make no mistake – this is a labour of love. The Keplers exist solely to play Johnston's music. They've worked

closely with the composer, and everything about this disc speaks of deep sympathy and devotion. The ordering of the works is particularly thoughtful. After the Seventh Quartet, the more conventionally classical Eighth feels positively lucid (the slow movement is luminous), and by the time you get to the single-movement Sixth, you're ready to dive straight in. Then, as an encore, we hear Johnston's own rough-hewn singing voice in *Quietness*, an exquisite little setting of Rumi, and feel an immediate human connection. There's no artistic or emotional compromise on this disc, and it yields enormous rewards.

I was sorry not to feel the same way about the Quartets Nos 3-6 by **Petros Shoujounian**. These works, based on liturgical chant, are mellifluous if slightly static and the performances, by the Canadian Quatuor Molinari, are highly polished. But I simply couldn't find here the depth of emotion that Shoujounian's subject matter – the Armenian Genocide – implies. Ben Johnston has said that a work isn't fully composed until it's performed well. This disc prompted the thought that 'well' may sometimes mean more than merely accurately and beautifully.

That it's not just a question of idiom is shown by three **Pēteris Vasks** quartets on Wergo. This, too, is music with an unabashedly spiritual inspiration: the rapturous closing Meditation of the Fourth Quartet evokes the flight of an angel. For Vasks, born in Soviet-occupied Latvia, this is anything but a sentimental gesture. Here, and in the lovely, cruelly interrupted Melodia that ends his First Quartet, spirituality is a radical act, achieved after a sometimes brutal struggle (the two Toccatas that punctuate the Fourth Quartet echo the two world wars). The Riga-based Spīķeru String Quartet (founded in 2011) understand that. There's a real inwardness about their playing – though, when Vasks demands it, they can find a flashing brilliance to match any of their Western contemporaries.

It's also hard to fault the concentration and virtuosity of the JACK Quartet in their premiere recording of the late **Horatiu Rădulescu**'s 29-minute-long String Quartet No 5 (1995). Each of its movements takes as its starting point a line from the Tao te Ching; but Rădulescu was nothing if not his own man (the very act of writing works entitled 'quartet' and 'sonata' was an affront to his fellow Paris-based spectralists) and the Quartet creates a tension between precision and freedom amid flickering, warping monochromes. After the high abstraction of the quartet, the Romanian

folk influences of the Fifth Piano Sonata (another debut recording, from the pianist Stephen Clarke) jump out in vivid colour.

As does everything on the aptly titled 'Glow' – a collection of chamber music composed between 2000 and 2013 by the Finnish violinist and composer **Jaakko Kuusisto** (Pekka's brother), and captured in sparkling sound by BIS. Here's a prime case for ignoring the booklet-notes and just listening. *Play II* and *Play III* are respectively an energetic single-movement piano quartet and an exuberantly inventive string quartet (performed by the Finnish ensemble Meta4). They're filled with allusions to film music, tango and minimalism – though there's nothing minimal about the personality and verve of this music. Kuusisto himself plays two pieces for violin and piano, and it's all great fun.

Kuusisto's compositional style won't be for everyone. Salonen came to mind, and I can already hear the cries of 'modern music for people who don't like modern music'. To which it's tempting to respond: who cares, when composer and players are so evidently enjoying themselves? As with almost all the works reviewed here, there's no sense of performers grappling with an alien language: these are fully realised interpretations, intelligent and expressive. That we can experience voices as diverse and rewarding as Samama, Johnston, Rădulescu and Vasks in performances of such quality is further evidence of what many of us have suspected for a little while: that, in the 21st century, the string quartet is the true ensemble of possibilities. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Samama I fear not wave nor wind!

Various artists

Etcetera ® ② KTC1561



Johnston String Quartets Nos 6-8, etc

Kepler Qt

New World ® NW80730-2



Shoujounian String Quartets Nos 3-6

Molinari Qt

ATMA Classique ® ACD2 2737



Vasks String Quartets Nos 1, 3, 4

Spīķeru Qt

Wergo ® WER7330-2



Rădulescu String Quartet No 5, etc

Various artists

Mode ® MODE290



J Kuusisto Glow

Various artists

BIS ® BIS2192

Kennedy opt for a marginally more deliberate tempo in the *Très vif* second movement of the Ravel Duo, though I preferred Harrell's expressive way at the start of the *Lent* third movement. Müller-Schott all but suspends vibrato – a gesture that suggests a certain level of sensual bliss – but I'd rather stick with Harrell's warmth and Kennedy's heartfelt response to him. Fischer initially mirrors Müller-Schott's affectedness but thankfully tempers it somewhat as the musical line proceeds.

There's not much to choose between the two teams in the finale, whereas at the start of Kodály's Duo Kennedy's natural penchant for folk-style music lends a spot of added pungency to his attack, and when it comes to the gypsy-style fiddle solo over a cello drone at 4'24" into the finale (Fischer/Müller-Schott) or 4'34" (Kennedy/Harrell), Kennedy captures the music's sense of improvisation to a T. Fischer sounds just a little too formal, even urbane. Talking in conversation about Erwin Schulhoff's Duo of 1925 (in the booklet), she's admirably honest about how she finds certain passages elusive, whether slow or fast, though I'd never have guessed as much had I not read the interview before listening to the CD. The fast Zingaresca has real drive, the finale a dogged, insistent quality.

Filling out their CD, Kennedy and Harrell add a Bach two-part Invention and the brilliant 'encore' that Fischer and Müller-Schott also include, the Passacaglia after Handel by Halvorson. Kennedy and Harrell open the piece emphatically and stretch its duration a minute beyond that of Fischer and Müller-Schott. Kennedy and Harrell offer a far more eventful reading, opting to turn some of the slower music into a shimmering tremolando. Fischer and Müller-Schott, on the other hand, rest content with the odd added embellishment, though both employ *sul ponticello*.

Choosing between the two duos is difficult but for me the presence of Schulhoff's enigmatic work on the new CD is a little too much of a draw to resist. Paradoxically, were that not the case, I'd incline more towards Kennedy and Harrell, simply because they throw themselves at the Ravel and Kodály works with such wholehearted abandon. Fischer and Müller-Schott are evidently en route to the same destination but they never quite get there. **Rob Cowan**

Halvorson, Kodály, Ravel – selected comparison:

Kennedy, Harrell (5/00) (WARN) 556963-2

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José Carreras

Richard Fairman celebrates the career of the Barcelona-born star who sang for Karajan and Bernstein before conquering illness and becoming part of The Three Tenors phenomenon

Memorably, it was only a year or two into his international career that I first heard a promising young Spanish tenor called José Carreras. The occasion was *La traviata* at the Royal Opera House in 1974, when he was paired with another up-and-coming young singer, Ileana Cotrubas.

What a team they made – so engaging, so full of feeling. A friend made an off-air recording of the BBC broadcast and it still makes thrilling listening today. What other Violetta and Alfredo in living memory have given heart and soul to the opera as they did?

In retrospect, everything that was to make Carreras one of the world's most sought-after tenors was already present in that *Traviata*. He sang with a warm, burnished sound, looked good, and invested each phrase with an ardour that made the heart beat faster. The emotional electricity of a Carreras performance crackled in the air.

For a singer who had only made his professional debut as a tenor in 1970, Carreras's career shot out of the starting gate. In part, at least, that was thanks to the encouragement of a champion and fellow native of Barcelona, Montserrat Caballé. Of Caballé, Carreras has said: 'Along with Maria Callas, she was the greatest.' Their recordings together include *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* with Riccardo Muti, *Un ballo in maschera* with Colin Davis, and *Il corsaro* in Philips's valuable early Verdi series, each glowing with that

DEFINING MOMENTS

•1958 – Debut at the opera

At the age of 11, Josep Maria Carreras i Coll makes his debut at the Gran Teatre del Liceu in Barcelona as the boy soprano Trujamán in Falla's *El retablo de maese Pedro*, followed a few months later by a small role in *La bohème*

•1974 – International debuts

A year of major debuts at the Royal Opera House in London, the Vienna State Opera, the Bavarian State Opera and the Metropolitan Opera, New York, confirms Carreras's place as one of the leading tenors of his generation

•1976 – Salzburg and Karajan

Carreras's first performance with Herbert von Karajan is Verdi's Requiem at the Salzburg Festival, inaugurating a partnership that leads to recordings of *Don Carlo*, *Aida*, *Carmen* and *Tosca*

•1984 – West Side Story

An all-star recording of *West Side Story*, featuring soprano Kiri Te Kanawa and Carreras as an operatic Maria and Tony, brings Carreras together with composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein in 'exhilarating' sessions

•1987 – Illness

While filming *La bohème* in Paris, Carreras is diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia. A gruelling period of treatment leads to a complete recovery, but his appearances in opera have to be reduced from then on

•1988 – Josep Carreras Leukaemia Foundation

The Josep Carreras Leukaemia Foundation (which uses Carreras's Catalan name) is founded in Barcelona, with affiliates in the US, Switzerland and Germany, to raise funds for research and social services for patients and their families

•1990 – The Three Tenors

The first concert with The Three Tenors (Luciano Pavarotti, Plácido Domingo and Carreras) takes place in the Baths of Caracalla in Rome on the eve of the 1990 World Cup final to a television audience estimated to be in the hundreds of millions

•2009 – Retirement from opera

Carreras formally announces his retirement from live opera performances in an interview with *The Times*, though one-off appearances in celebrity and fund-raising concerts continue

Mediterranean sound they shared, even if in other respects Carreras and Caballé were rather different singers.

On stage, though, there was another partnership that was even more memorable in the early years. Katia Ricciarelli was born in the same year as Carreras, 1946, and perhaps fate intended them to play opera's great loving couples – Donizetti's Lucia and Edgardo, Leonora and Manrico in *Il trovatore*, best of all Mimì and Rodolfo, where Ricciarelli was so tender and limpid, Carreras so boyish and impulsive. The closing minutes of their *La bohème* were nearly unbearable, so unaffected were they together – not like opera at all, more like real life. A few years later I attended the Philips recording sessions with Colin Davis and can still see them creeping off stage hand in hand during the final bars of the Act 1 love duet, trying not to make the floorboards squeak. (They never managed it. A retake had to be done with them positioned at the back.)

These were the golden years, when Carreras's voice gloried in its youthful freshness. The voice was a full, lyric tenor: not agile enough for Rossini, though his *bel canto* roles did include a wonderfully vulnerable and touching Nemorino in *L'elisir d'amore*. In Verdi, he was a headstrong Don Carlo and a Riccardo at once effervescent and authoritative in *Un ballo in maschera*. His Werther embodied the matinée idol poet, even if the voice was never quite



one for Gallic elegance. All of these roles can be heard on disc.

The move into more dramatic roles in the latter part of the 1980s was criticised by some as being a step too far. Certainly, the voice sometimes had a steely thread, but in the best of his later roles – *Andrea Chénier*, perhaps *Radames* – there was no question that Carreras had the strength of voice and personality to carry them off. Then came leukaemia and an inevitable reduction in his opera performances. ‘I had one career before the illness, another afterwards,’ he said. ‘I had to try to adapt to the situation.’

Looming large in that later career was The Three Tenors concert, a defining moment for all three of them which Carreras has claimed was his idea. As well as making household names of Pavarotti, Domingo and Carreras, it is worth remembering that the event drew millions worldwide to opera who had not experienced it before and also raised money for Carreras’s leukaemia foundation. A new audience went on to discover Carreras through his concerts with popular singers and his humanitarian work.

There is sometimes a tendency to talk of Carreras as the ‘number three’ of The Three Tenors. That seems unfair. While Pavarotti may have had the most beautiful voice, and Domingo the most impressive all-round strengths, anybody who saw Carreras in his prime will remember the emotional immediacy of his performances as if they happened yesterday. I can still see him in my mind’s eye coming on stage for the final act of *Carmen*, a Don José broken, desperate, a shadow of his former self, and the intensity of those final minutes of the opera remain seared into my memory. That is surely what being an operatic icon is all about. **G**

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Puccini *La bohème* Carreras, Ricciarelli, et al
Orchestra and Chorus of the Royal Opera
House / Colin Davis
Decca (12/79^R)

Instrumental



Philip Kennicott listens to a new recording of music by John Jones:

'Jones's music comes alive, and this set far transcends the dutiful rehabilitation of a neglected minor composer' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 86**



Lindsay Kemp on the latest in Pierre Hantai's Scarlatti survey:

'Hantai shows what can be achieved by a virtuoso who commands perfect technical control' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 89**

JS Bach

Solo Violin Sonatas and Partitas, BWV1001-1006

Kyung Wha Chung *vn*

Warner Classics (F) ② 0190295 944162 (137' • DDD)



Kyung Wha Chung's solo Bach has changed since she last recorded some more than

40 years ago, but then, whose hasn't? In 1974 there was not a period violin version to be had (no one had dared), and her Decca disc of the Second Partita and Third Sonata (11/75) hinted little at the changes in fashion to come. But it would be impertinent, I suspect, to suggest that the development in Chung's view of this music owes much to the early music movement; it feels more organic and personal than that, like the fruit of considerable accumulated experience and private contemplation gathered in the long build-up (including five years out injured, of course) before making her first recording of all the Sonatas and Partitas.

The 'romantic' deep tone, passionate climaxes and long legato phrasing of that earlier release were not in any case particularly excessive for the time, projected as they were in wonderfully clean lines and confident momentum. In the new recording her sound, while still pretty gorgeous, is leaner and more incisive, yet there is no feeling of consciously applied 'Baroque style'. Chung adds virtually no ornamentation of her own, and some moments that a 'Baroque' player might interpret as a written-out flourish she still takes rather literally. Articulation is varied more, but still less than might be expected these days.

When coupled with a surprisingly relaxed use of dynamic contrast, this last can give a rather unrelenting feel, and indeed there are movements in which a certain doggedness (in the First Partita's Doubles for instance) fails to charm. When Chung finds her mojo, however, the results really seem to come from

within, and are irresistible: the gently forward-moving swing of the sarabandes and easy airborne rapture of the freer slow movements, the fizzing delineation of lines in the Third Sonata's *Allegro assai* and, above all, the compelling trajectory of the Second Partita's Chaconne, sent on its way with whiplash multiple-stops, are moments to savour.

Although there are signs here and there of Chung fighting a tough technical battle in the studio, this release will surely be cherished by her devotees and admired by others for its moments of unique beauty.

Lindsay Kemp

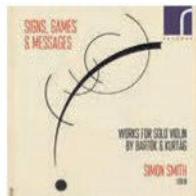
Bartók · Kodály

Bartók Solo Violin Sonata, Sz117

Kodály Signs, Games and Messages - excs

Simon Smith *vn*

Resonus (F) RES10167 (57' • DDD)



If dozens of recordings of Bartók's Solo Sonata are available, scarcely a handful of violinists have recorded the solo pieces of György Kurtág. Born 45 years after Bartók, Kurtág grew up some 85 miles from the elder composer's birthplace (both locations now in Romania). Kurtág has said, quite sincerely, that his 'mother tongue is Bartók'. Both pianist-composers assiduously cultivated an understanding of the violin. These factors combined make Simon Smith's release, combining canonic Bartók with Kurtág pieces from the past 30 or so years, apt and welcome.

Kurtág's *Signs, Games and Messages* is a sort of ongoing compositional notebook similar to the eight volumes of *Games*, though the latter are pieces for piano and piano duet, while the former are designated for both string and wind instruments. The 18 Smith has selected for this disc, the longest of which is a little over three minutes, are characteristically terse and musically rich. His thoughtful,

sympathetic performances discern the unique qualities of each.

Three *perpetuum mobiles* take the same arpeggiation as a starting point for arrivals in three very different places. Kurtág has written many memorial tributes for friends and colleagues, and two of those included here – to László Mensáros, one of the most beloved Hungarian actors of the 20th century, and to the conductor Tamás Blum – are deeply affecting in their understatement. The questing, fragmentary 'Hommage à John Cage' seems a perfect likeness of the composer.

Naturally, in the Bartók Sonata, Smith faces some stiff competition. His interpretation may not have the earthiness of Viktoria Mullova, the intellectual compass of Christian Tetzlaff or the idiomatic implacability of Barnabás Kelemen. That said, it is a compelling reading with a firm point of view.

Smith's strong, clear sound is superbly captured in a space that accentuates the disc's existential aura of one human alone with little but his own consciousness for company. Patrick Rucker

Bartók – selected comparisons:

Mollova (9/88*) (PHIL) ► 475 7460DX2

Tetzlaff (9/04) (VIRG/ERAT) ► 545668-2

Kelemen (5/13) (HUNG) HSACD32515

Beethoven

Piano Sonata No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106

Grigory Sokolov *pf*

Sony Classical (F) 88985 33607-2 (52' • DDD)

Recorded 1975



Grigory Sokolov's 1975 recording of the Hammerklavier Sonata is a minute faster overall than his live account from the 2013 Salzburg Festival recently issued by DG. The movement proportions are different, however. Thirty years ago the slow movement was even longer – 23'38" as against 21'28" – and even more searching. Studio recording it may have been, but it



Simon Smith offers 'thoughtful and sympathetic performances' of solo violin music by Bartók and Kodály on Resonus

feels as though taken in massive long breaths. Admittedly, some of the daring ritardandos are not placed where Beethoven asks them to be, and it's not just textual fidelity but structural contour that makes me favour the composer's markings. But the control of sonority at all dynamic levels shows that the legend built up around Sokolov was not only down to his power and agility.

For those latter qualities, Sokolov's first movement in 1975 was far superior to his recent rethinking, which is fully 2'15" slower, without any gain in clarity and with a significant loss in overall conviction. Both versions do tend to efface the difference between *forte* and *fortissimo*, and again my objection is not on textual but on structural grounds. Both finales, on the other hand, are awesomely articulate and hard to fault.

Sokolov's voicing of textures throughout the sonata is a marvel in itself. But it is the 1975 slow movement above all that has the stamp of mastery of a Gilelsian order. Sokolov may only have been 25 at the time and not everything in his performance feels fully mature: occasionally he seems to be playing for effect rather than for truth. But he was already nine years on from winning the Tchaikovsky Competition, and there is certainly a massive self-belief and artistic

presence here, so much so that I would take some convincing that his Beethoven has moved forwards over the years. The Sony booklet essay on the music makes refreshing reading beside DG's paean to the pianist. **David Fanning**

Selected comparison:

Sokolov (3/16) (DG) 479 5426GH2

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas - No 3, Op 2 No 3; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57; No 30, Op 109

Angela Brownridge pf

Challenge Classics (F) CC72707
(72' • DDD/DSD)



As a Beethoven interpreter, Angela Brownridge hits and misses. Her long experience with Op 2 No 3 reveals itself in the shifts of emphasis and timing with each appearance of the first-movement theme in thirds. Listen, also, to how she holds the *Adagio*'s rhythm fairly firmly throughout, yet generates drama and tension by laying into the dissonances like pinpricks. Brownridge energises the Scherzo with unexpected accents and phrase groupings,

but the concluding *Allegro assai* unfolds at a lopede rather than a sprint, without the poise and suppleness distinguishing, for example, Solomon's classic recording.

Brownridge yields a strict leash throughout the *Appassionata* Sonata's tumultuous first movement, yet the music never sounds rigid or overly driven, due to her wide dynamic range and daring pedal effects. The *Andante con moto* variations are seamlessly integrated but a little square-toed and self-consciously executed. Unfortunately, Brownridge's first movement vibrancy doesn't carry over to the finale, and one wonders why she doesn't accelerate for the coda, as Beethoven indicates.

Brownridge's awkward transitions and stiff phrasing in Op 109's introduction hardly match the poetic eloquence and continuity from interpretations so antipodal as those of Emil Gilels and Paul Lewis. But she warms up for an energetic and well-contrasted *Prestissimo*. The pianist's measured, well sustained treatment of the third movement variations conveys genuine concentration and serenity, if little contrast. A case in point is her slow and heavy execution of the *Allegro vivace* third variation. All told, an uneven release.

Jed Distler

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The Times

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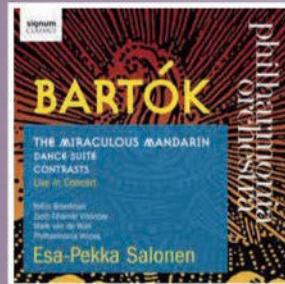
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SIGCD466



BARTÓK

THE MIRACULOUS MANDARIN
DANCE SUITE, CONTRASTS
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Philharmonia Voices
Yefim Bronfman
Zsolt-Tihámér Visontay
Mark van de Wiel
Esa-Pekka Salonen conductor

Recorded as part of their critically praised 'Infernal Dance' season, the Philharmonia Orchestra under Esa-Pekka Salonen explore three contrasting works by Belá Bartók – the chamber piece Contrasts, and the orchestral works Dance Suite and The Miraculous Mandarin.

SIGCD462

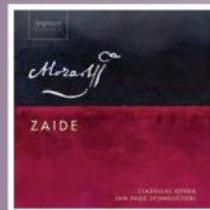


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Pavel Kolesnikov: beautiful and strikingly original performances of Chopin's Mazurkas

Chopin

Mazurkas – No 1, Op 6 No 1; No 10, Op 17 No 1; No 11, Op 17 No 2; No 12, Op 17 No 3; No 13, Op 17 No 4; No 14, Op 24 No 1; No 15, Op 24 No 2; No 16, Op 24 No 3; No 17, Op 24 No 4; No 19, Op 30 No 2; No 22, Op 33 No 1; No 24, Op 33 No 3; No 26, Op 41 No 1; No 30, Op 50 No 1; No 31, Op 50 No 2; No 32, Op 50 No 3; No 34, Op 56 No 2; No 35, Op 56 No 3; No 37, Op 59 No 2; No 38, Op 59 No 3; No 47, Op 68 No 2; No 50, *Op posth KK lib/4*; No 51, *Op posth KK IIb/5*; No 56, *Op posth KK IIa/3*

Pavel Kolesnikov pf

Hyperion ® CDA68137 (69' • DDD)



Chopin is far and away the most popular among his coevals, Mendelssohn, Schumann and Liszt, and much of his music is within the grasp of amateur pianists. Responses to him are so deeply and inevitably personal that, in a way, the Mazurkas, Chopin's preferred dance form, belong to everyone, whether they first experienced them listening to performances or recordings by Rubinstein or Pollini, watching choreography of Fokine or Robbins, or through their own hands.

Personally speaking, I don't recall not recognising at least a couple of mazurkas. All the more astonishing, then, to encounter in Pavel Kolesnikov's new disc an ideal realisation of these exquisite dances, the likes of which I never dreamt of hearing.

Three sets (Opp 17, 24 and 50) are given complete. But Kolesnikov doesn't present his thoughtful selection of 24 dances in tedious chronological order. As befits a dazzling bouquet, each blossom is given unique placement for maximum enjoyment of colour and fragrance.

It is Chopin's dogged repetitions that can lead the mazurka's most admiring votaries into desperate straits of rhythmic grotesquery. Kolesnikov takes these repetitions at face value, as integral to Chopin's expressive intent. In his scrupulous observation of all repeats, he seems to revel in endlessly varying them without resort to distorting rubato. Not that Kolesnikov lacks pliancy. Liszt said it: 'A wind plays in the leaves, life unfolds and develops beneath them, but the tree remains the same – that is the Chopin rubato.' Kolesnikov does it.

Some of the larger set pieces, Op 59 No 3, Op 24 No 4 or Op 50 No 1, for instance, come to life almost cinematically. One easily imagines a large drawing room cleared of furniture and rugs, its floors

swept clean and sprinkled in preparation for a dozen couples whose dancing skill is a joy to behold. The largest of these, Op 50 No 1, unfolds with great affective variety and richly varied sonorities, its tragic utterance chaste, courageous, the whole as tight as the snug fit of a master joiner.

Others speak with seductive charm. The poise of Op 17 No 2 is maintained without a trace of maudlin sentimentality. The rhythmic vitality of Op 33 No 1 keeps any suggestion of morose indulgence at bay. The strikingly different characters of Op 33 No 3, ingratiating, delicate, and the sensual melancholy of Op 68 No 2 share a sense of confiding intimacy. The stuttering rhetoric and gossamer *fioritura* of Op 17 No 4 are a nocturne in all but name.

The Warsaw Mazurkas are a world unto themselves. KK IIa/3, perhaps the earliest, is lithe and spry with the unselfconsciousness of youth. In the hushed sensuality of KK IIb/5, octaves in the middle contrasting section evoke silver bells, while the trills at the end grip the heart. KK IIb/4 in particular embodies Kolesnikov's ability to choose the perfect sonorities that seem to instantly encapsulate the character of the music.

There are some mazurkas, such as Op 24 No 3, when an inexplicable kinesthetic

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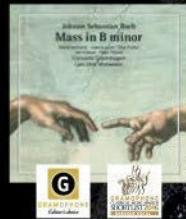
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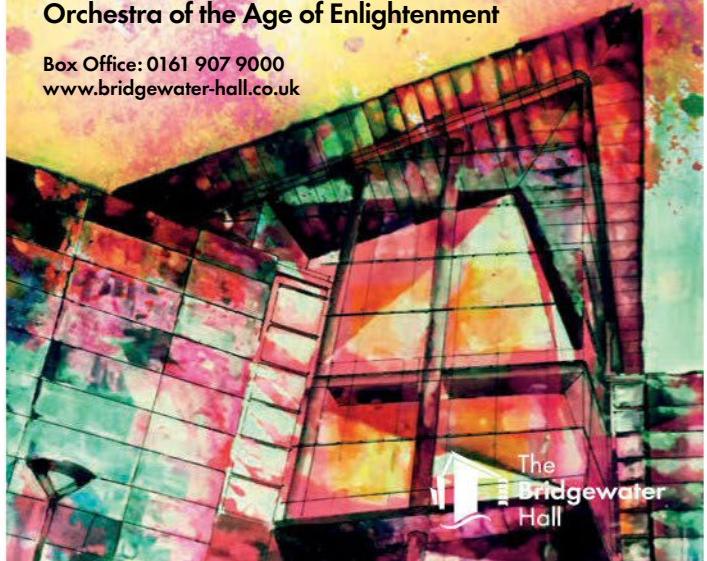
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Andrea Dieci: fresh accounts of Henze's works for guitar, at budget price (review page 86)

magic takes over and the world's rotation all but stops. Prone to lose its way in rhetorical excess, Op 30 No 2 here remains shapely, proportionate. In the familiar Op 6 No 1, the contrasting middle section borders on the terrifying. The implacable tragedy of Op 56 No 3 is so pervasive, you may find yourself, as I did, clinging to the contrasting middle section as though to a life raft.

I know of no other pianist who combines attention to the smallest detail with such nobility of phrase and cohesive sweep of the dance as a whole. The engineers have captured Kolesnikov's sound – silvery, deeply resonant – perfectly. Listening to this recording over a period of weeks, Wagner's description of Beethoven's Seventh Symphony as 'the apotheosis of the dance' kept running through my mind. Whether or not Kolesnikov's new disc will suggest to everyone 'the apotheosis of the mazurka', for me these performances are the most beautiful and strikingly original I've heard.

Patrick Rucker

Glinka

'Piano Variations'

A Greeting to my Homeland. Nocturnes - 1828;

'La séparation'. Variations - on Alyabyev's

Romance 'The Nightingale'; on the Russian Song 'Down in the valley'; on an Original Theme; on a Theme from Bellini's 'I Capuleti e i Montecchi'

Ton Nu Nguyet Minh pf
Capriccio ® C5285 (73' • DDD)



Glinka's piano music holds its place in the repertoire about as firmly as his (far more significant) operas *A Life for the Tsar* and *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, the works that earned their creator the sobriquet 'The Father of Russian Music'.

No evidence of that here; and no major pianist – with the exception of Shura Cherkassky, who recorded the brief Tarantelle in A minor in the 1940s – has ever included Glinka in their repertoire. Understandably, they opt for the greater interest of Field, Hummel and Chopin, of whose piano works Glinka's so often seem to be pale imitations (Glinka had three lessons from Field which left an indelible impression, as did the occasion when Hummel played to him). The operas of Bellini and Donizetti were further influences during his autodidactic formative years (the late 1820s and

early '30s), from which period most of the works on this disc are taken.

It illustrates forcefully how ably Glinka could write page after page of forgettable melodies and predictable figurations (try the four parts of *A Greeting to My Homeland* if you're tired of counting sheep). But...dig deep and, like a pig searching for truffles, you will unearth some gems. The *Variations on Alyabyev's Romance 'The Nightingale'* (a theme familiar from Liszt's more elaborate arrangement) are utterly charming, followed here by the Chopinesque Nocturne in E flat (1828). You may also be taken by the last and longest (13'47") item, the *Variations on a Theme from Bellini's 'I Capuleti e i Montecchi'* (1831).

The reason to delight in these admittedly thin pickings is entirely down to the effervescent, stylish and sensitive playing of the Vietnamese pianist Ton Nu Nguyet Minh (Moscow-trained and now teaching in Berlin). On a nicely recorded disc, her deft, lightly pedalled touch in the florid passagework reminded me of Howard Shelley, and that's saying something: able to make much from very little, as well as the best possible case for Glinka's uneven output.

Jeremy Nicholas



Antoine Françoise and Robin Green – the Françoise-Green Piano Duo – present an intriguing programme of Bach, Kurtág and Schubert on Claves

Henze

'Complete Music for Solo Guitar'

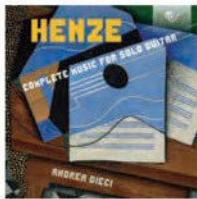
'Drei Tentos' aus Kammermusik 1958.

Sonatas on Shakespearean Characters –

No 1, 'Royal Winter Music'; No 2

Andrea Dieci gtr

Brilliant Classics ® 95186 (73' • DDD)



It's often said that Hans Werner Henze's music for solo guitar displays a more

intimate, lyrical aspect of the German composer's immense output in just about every genre. But as the award-winning Italian guitarist Andrea Dieci's dramatic performances of Henze's two *Sonatas on Shakespearean Characters* suggest, this is less to do with the writing than with the nature of the instrument. True, the flowing, meditative *Drei Tentos*, those three fantasies drawn from the 1958 *Kammermusik* for tenor, guitar, clarinet, horn, bassoon and string quartet, look both inwards and backwards to an idealised antiquity. Here, Dieci imbues them with a spare, magical quality in which the crispness of his articulation enhances rather than diminishes a certain wistful *sfumato*.

But once we get to the portraits of Gloucester, Romeo and Juliet, Ariel, Ophelia, Touchstone, Audrey and William and Oberon of *Royal Winter Music*, the First *Sonata on Shakespearean Characters*, written for Julian Bream in 1975-76, we enter an altogether more intense, unsettling sound world. The Second *Sonata on Shakespearean Characters* (1979; also written for Bream) – Sir Andrew Aguecheek, Bottom's Dream and Mad Lady Macbeth – while richer in humour and with a dream-like elasticity of time and tone, is, in its final crazed movement, more disquieting again.

Whether it is in the clashes and bangs of 'Gloucester', the transparent skeins of 'Ariel', the textured poignancy of 'Ophelia' or the erotic ambivalences of 'Romeo and Juliet', Dieci proves himself more than equal to the task of transmitting Henze's – and at least some traces of Shakespeare's – psychological depth and subtlety. As such, this recording offers a fresh and viable alternative to those excellent accounts already on the market by the likes of Bream (RCA) or Franz Halász (Naxos).

William Yeoman

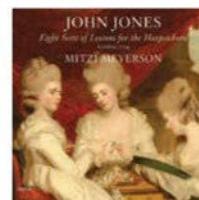
J Jones

Eight Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord.

Brillante (1761)

Mitzi Meyerson hpd

Glossa ® ② GCD921808 (107' • DDD)



Harpsichordist Mitzi Meyerson has tremendous fun with these *Eight Sets of Lessons for the Harpsichord* by the English composer John Jones, a contemporary of CPE Bach and Gluck, and whose musical instincts are reminiscent of both of these better-known figures.

Her ornamentation is adroit, limpid and resplendent, her registration choices smart and revealing, and she is happy to rearrange and interpolate for more striking musical and rhetorical effects.

Meyerson is determined to make a case for Jones, and she succeeds. In a brief introductory essay, she places him in the shadow of Handel, whose domination of London musical life continued well after his near half-century residence ended with his death in 1759. And so, like Maurice Greene, William Boyce and Richard Jones, John Jones suffered in the Handelian monoculture: 'Had Handel lived in another time or place, these other musicians might have won a more prominent niche in

musical history,' she writes. The damage, it seems, was mainly to his posthumous reputation; while alive, Jones did quite well, serving as organist and composer for major religious institutions, including St Paul's Cathedral from 1755 until his death in 1796.

On the page, Jones's Lessons look both simple (often written in two parts) and occasionally eccentric, with dance movements given familiar titles (*Allemandes*, *Gigues*, *Gavottes*) but sometimes odd rhythmic or structural twists. In the Third Lesson, Meyerson hears echoes of Scarlatti in the *Gigue*, which does indeed suggest Scarlatti's particular keyboard virtuosity, the basic two-part division of his sonatas and the sudden harmonic changes (especially in the second half) so characteristic of the Italian composer's idiosyncratic style. In other Lessons, CPE Bach is in the wings, with melodic lines that make adventurous upward leaps before resolving with Bach's particular flair for elegantly awkward surprise.

Meyerson doesn't quite recompose these works but she is happy to take the music as a basic template for extensive elaboration. She may repeat a line for effect or end a conclusive phrase with a large, improvised flourish. I can't find a single instance in which she oversteps the bounds of good taste and, more importantly, faithful service to the spirit of the music. Furthermore, Meyerson is alert to the background musical ambience of this material, the larger complexity of London as musical entrepôt, with influence not just from major figures such as Handel, CPE Bach and Johann Christian Bach but also from the French harpsichordists, folk music and, in one delightful case, bagpipe music (she adds a drone figure in the accompaniment and places the melody an octave lower on the four-foot stop to heighten the nasal effect).

Jones's music comes alive through her efforts, and this double-disc set far

transcends the dutiful rehabilitation of a neglected minor composer. It entertains.

Philip Kennicott

Kurtág · JS Bach · Schubert

'Games, Chorals and Fantasy'

JS Bach/Kurtág Ach wie nichtig, ach wie flüchtig, BWV644. Das alte Jahr vergangen ist, BWV614. Aus tiefer Not schrei ich zu dir, BWV687. Christum wir sollen loben schon, BWV611 (two recordings). Gottes Zeit ist die allerbeste Zeit (Actus tragicus), BWV106.

O Lamm Gottes, unschuldig, BWV618

Kurtág Játékok (Games) - excs

Schubert Fantasie, D940

Françoise-Green Piano Duo

Claves © 50-1601 (45' • DDD)

'Brücken'

JS Bach/Busoni Improvisation on the Chorale 'Wi wohl ist mir, o Freund der Seelen', BWV517

JS Bach/Kurtág Alle Menschen müssen sterben, BWV643 **Kurtág Játékok** (Games) - excs **Ligeti**

Sonatina Reger Variations and Fugue on a Theme by Beethoven

Klavierduo Stenzl

Genuin © GEN16549 (62' • DDD)



The music of György Kurtág, who celebrated his 90th birthday in February, is enjoying a richly deserved if belated groundswell of recordings. It forms the linchpin of CDs by two duo piano teams, Antoine Françoise and Robin Green and the siblings Hans-Peter and Volker Stenzl.

Françoise-Green are intelligent and sensitive musicians with a genuine flair for imaginative programming. They satisfactorily intersperse seven of Kurtág's Bach transcriptions with 10 of his original works. Near the end, they roll out Schubert's F minor *Fantasie*, a work that

could easily swamp a less gifted composer than Kurtág. Françoise-Green's interpretations of the Hungarian composer are so engaging and fresh, however, that it's Schubert who risks being the also ran.

Three Kurtág waltzes epitomise the variety of these interpretations. Twin pieces, titled *Prelude* and *Waltz*, hilariously satirise the classic Viennese waltz. Gathering momentum through an extended 'Intrada', they fall to the floor exhausted at just the moment the first waltz should commence. The third waltz, evoking the expatriate Hungarian poet János Pilinszky, creates an atmosphere of barren loneliness over an unrecognisable metre.

Françoise-Green largely succeed in bringing fresh eyes and ears to the *Fantasie*. If I prefer a more personally invested approach, their objective reading of the score is powerful and persuasive. Admirably abstemious with the right pedal, they prefer to make legato with fingers rather than feet so that, overall, we hear more varieties of attack and release than usual. Big guns are reserved for the fugue, a choice highlighting the formal perfection of Schubert's last essays.

In a final programming inspiration, after the *Fantasie* Françoise-Green return to Kurtág with a piece called *One more voice from far away*, which requires one (or both?) pianists to sing as well as play. Apart from its own intrinsic, existential beauty, the piece underscores the gaping chasm of 188 years that separate us from Schubert. This was all captured with striking fidelity at St John's Smith Square in London last autumn.

Kurtág plays a smaller role on Klavierduo Stenzl's disc and the performances fall short of the empathetic atmosphere of Françoise-Green. Their clipped, arid delivery of seven original pieces and a Bach transcription seem more appropriate to Webern who, while undeniably an influence on Kurtág, is a composer of another age and



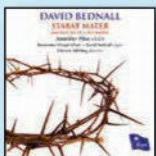
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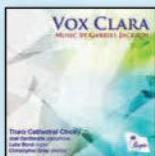
**Stabat Mater,
Marian Suite, Ave Maria**

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Classical Music Sentinel August 2016



VOX CLARA:

Music by Gabriel Jackson

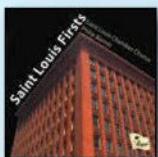
The Choir of Truro Cathedral directed by Christopher Gray, Luke Bond (organ), Joel Garthwaite (saxophone)
REGCD479

'Joel Garthwaite (saxophone) and Luke Bond (organ) sprinkle stardust over everything they play.' Observer August 13th 2016

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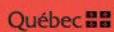
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circumstance. Their relief upon arrival at the extended Busoni improvisation on a Bach chorale prelude seems almost palpable. If on occasion the Reger *Beethoven Variations* strike one as rather cloyingly sentimentalised, Duo Stenzl's performance of Ligeti's terse and witty 1950 Sonatina is a dead-centre bull's eye. Cologne Radio is responsible for the true-to-life sound.

Patrick Rucker

D Scarlatti

Keyboard Sonatas - Kk54; Kk133; Kk144; Kk201; Kk204a; Kk208i Kk212; Kk247; Kk279; Kk302; Kk381; Kk402; Kk403; Kk405; Kk456; Kk457; Kk533

Pierre Hantaï *hpda*

Mirare ® MIR285 (76' • DDD)



That this is the fourth volume of Scarlatti sonatas by Pierre Hantaï reminds us that he is no newcomer to this magical composer. That the earlier releases were in 1993, 2005 and 2006 suggests for one thing that we can stop fretting about whether or not there is a complete cycle coming (30 more CDs needed for that!), but for another that he likes to get to know his sonatas well before recording them – a process further hinted at by the fact that in live recitals he tends to choose which ones to play only as he goes along.

The process has certainly been worth it. Playing a bright German-style harpsichord with quick decay but plenty of colour and depth, Hantaï shows what can be achieved by a virtuoso who commands perfect technical control in which nothing is rushed or scrambled, a touch at the keys from which every note speaks clearly, and an emotional eloquence in which melodies sing and a subtle strategy of spread chords, hesitations, accents, displacements and articulations leads your ear to the music's important notes, harmonies and rhythms, even in the most challenging passages. What extra ornamentation there is brings variety rather than show, and the beauty of the package is that it all sounds perfectly natural, the sublime result of artistic mastery committed to the task of communicating Scarlatti's ever-delightful genius.

As on previous volumes, there is a mixture here of the well known and less familiar. The former include the celebratory Kk133, rattling Kk457 and cherished Kk208, here played with an immense love and guile that never threatens to overload the spare

framework of its melody and strummed accompaniment. The latter offer piled-up repetitions in Kk405, disorientating stop-starts in Kk201, lacelike delicacy in Kk279 and strange rhythmic fracturings in Kk45 – but then, with Scarlatti, there's almost always something that can excite, surprise or beguile. In the hands of this top-level interpreter of his works, they never fail.

Lindsay Kemp

'American First Sonatas'

'Anthology of American Piano Music, Vol 1'

Griffes Piano Sonata

E MacDowell Piano Sonata No 1, 'Tragica', Op 45

Reinagle Philadelphia Sonata I

Siegmeister Piano Sonata No 1, 'American'

Cécile Licad *pf*

Danacord ® DACOCD774 (71' • DDD)



This is the first volume in a project to, as the blurb puts it, 'show the stylistic breadth, high musical quality and great originality of the best American piano works'. Such a varied programme could have sounded piecemeal and that it's not is as much down to the conviction of Cécile Licad as to the music itself.

Alexander Reinagle: who he, you might well ask? Born the same year as Mozart, he was in fact Edinburgh-educated but emigrated to the States at the age of 30. Written in around 1786, his D major Sonata is a real charmer, the first movement making its effect through high-energy figuration set against clear-cut harmonies, while the second is a lolling *Allegro*.

Edward MacDowell and the tragically short-lived Charles Griffes (cut down by the flu pandemic in 1920 at just 35) both trained in Europe. MacDowell's *Tragica* Sonata dates from 1893, a year after Dvořák had turned up in New York to head the National Conservatory of Music of America, with the aim of helping American composers find their own strain of nationalism. The piece has a kind of bardic quality suggestive of great vistas (Liszt springs to mind, but so too does Grieg). Licad is equally engaging in the sombre and sonorous slow movement as in the grand *Allegro eroico* finale.

Griffes tends to be dubbed an American Impressionist but that's hardly an apt label, and his compelling Piano Sonata, completed in 1918, is an intriguing mix of traditional form and questing harmonies, sometimes dipping into the Scriabin-esque in terms of harmony and the rapidity with which the moods shift. Compared to

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• Concerto plans on Onyx

Gramophone's Young Artist of the Year 2015,

Joseph Moog (pictured), will be reunited

with conductor **Nicholas Milton** and the

Deutsches RSO Saarbrücken-Kaiserslautern

– who featured on his Editor's Choice coupling of Grieg and Moskowski (9/15) – for a new Onyx disc featuring Brahms's mighty Piano Concerto No 2 and Strauss's *Burleske*. The recording takes place in November this year, and is scheduled for release November next. **James Ehnes** is recording a disc of Beethoven, featuring the Violin Concerto, the two Romances and the early Violin Concerto in C, WoO5. The sessions take place late in September and early in October with **Andrew Manze** and the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**. The disc is due out in October next year.



• Duo goes solo on Ondine

Lars Vogt and **Christian Tetzlaff**, whose Ondine recording of the Brahms violin sonatas was *Gramophone's* Recording of the Month in September, are also being kept busy individually. Vogt embarks on a projected cycle of the Beethoven piano concertos in Newcastle with the **Royal Northern**

Sinfonia with the First and the Fifth, recorded respectively in October and November. The disc is due for release in April next year. Tetzlaff, meanwhile, is recording solo Bach – the Partitas – in the Sendesaal Bremen in October, for a disc due out next autumn.

• Bavarian Alps

Mariss Jansons is due to release a new recording of Richard Strauss's *Eine*

Alpensinfonie – his first, on RCO Live, was

a *Gramophone* Recording of the Month back in 2008. This time it'll be with the

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra,

with BR-Klassik on hand to record concert performances at Munich's Philharmonie im Gasteig in October. The disc is due to be released in January.



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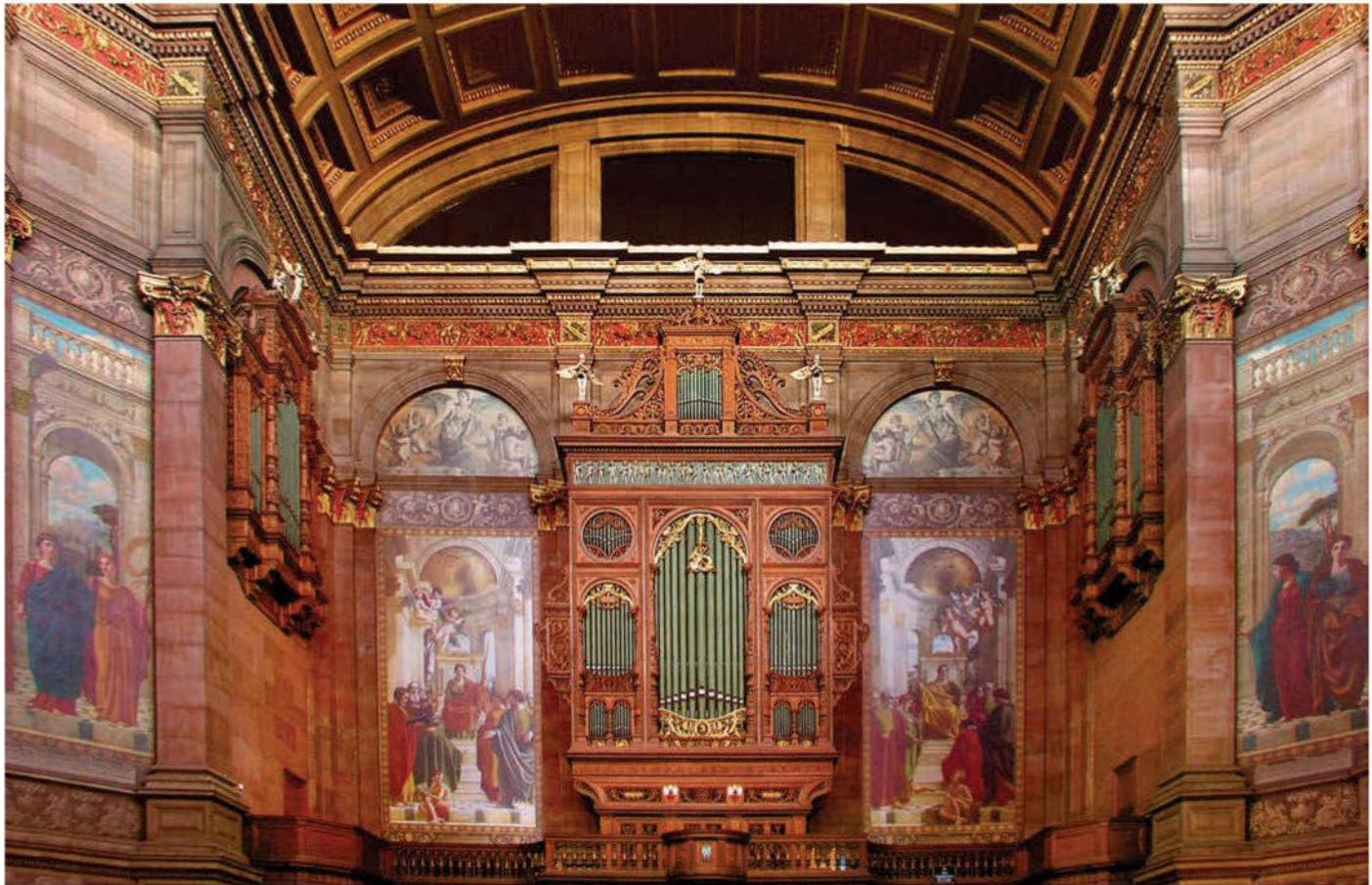
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'A magnificent if somewhat eccentric monster': the recently-restored organ of the University of Edinburgh's McEwan Hall is put through its paces by John Kitchen

Ohlsson and Wehr, Licad is slightly softer-edged when it comes to the outer movements, the finale in particular, whose clangorous edginess (of which Prokofiev would have been proud) is a touch subdued. Her slow movement dreams more daring than Ohlsson's but I marginally prefer his greater sense of flow.

To end, the *American Sonata* of Elie Siegmeister, near-contemporary of Copland. Here, at last, is an overtly home-grown piece, both in its jazziness and in the bouncy bumptiousness of the first movement. The second movement is in strong contrast, being predominantly high-lying and inward, while Licad finds plenty of energy in the finale. **Harriet Smith**

Griffes – selected comparisons:

Ohlsson (6/13) (HYPE) CD467907

Wehr (CONN) CD4205

'Gaudeamus igitur'

Anonymous *Gaudeamus igitur* Campra

Idoménée - Rigaudon Guilmant Marche religieuse (March on a Theme of Handel)

Handel Ode for St Cecilia's Day, HWV76 - Overture; March Hollins Concert Overture

Leighton Et resurrexit McDowall Celebration

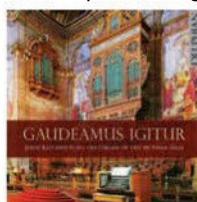
Purcell Three Trumpet Tunes Roman Sinfonia da chiesa Salomé Grand choeur, Op 68 No 2

Widor Symphony No 3, Op 69 - Marcia

John Kitchen org

Delphian © DCD34163 (72' • DDD)

Played on the organ of the McEwan Hall, University of Edinburgh



GAUDEAMUS IGITUR
John Kitchen plays the organ of the McEwan Hall, University of Edinburgh

The organ of the McEwan Hall, University of Edinburgh, is now

back in action after a major overhaul. Built in 1897 by Robert Hope-Jones and subject to various rebuilds and modifications over the years, the instrument needed some serious TLC by the time Forth Pipe Organs carried out its restoration in 2014. It is a magnificent if somewhat eccentric monster set in a fine acoustic, extremely well captured here by producer/engineer Paul Baxter.

The programme, however, is an odd mix and not entirely satisfactory. As University Organist, one of John Kitchen's main duties is to play for all graduation ceremonies. Several of the works here are used for such occasions, such as the eponymous title-track as a rousing curtain-raiser. Then, like a sip of lemon after a bar of chocolate, comes *Celebration* by Cecilia McDowall (*b*1951 and a pupil of Kenneth

Leighton), commissioned in 2014 by the University of Portsmouth for its graduation ceremonies. It is not the composer's acerbic harmonies that I find unappealing as much as the constant repetition throughout its eight-minute duration of the A natural two above middle C in the rapid passagework, more an irritating pest than a celebration.

Three pieces by composers born in the late 17th century follow – Johann Helmich Roman (1694-1758), Henry Purcell and André Campra (1660-1744) – all given in the grand Victorian manner. The centrepiece, and by far the longest item (17'01"), is Leighton's *Et resurrexit* (subtitled 'Theme, Fantasy and Fugue'). To my ears, the stately McEwan Hall organ is not the best instrument to engage with this bracing and astringent work, and is far better suited to the four composers whose works succeed it and which are roughly contemporary with it (Théodore Salomé died the year before the organ was installed). I could have wished for more colour and variety to distinguish the Hollins, Widor and Guilmant from one another, let alone the Handel Overture and March that ends the recital, but if you want to give your speakers a workout then Kitchen cannot fail to impress on this attractively presented disc. **Jeremy Nicholas**

David Lang

The Los Angeles native creates music of pristine beauty through the pared-down purity of his scores, says Kate Molleson

There's no mistaking a David Lang score. At 59 he has achieved what few composers do in their lifetime, or ever: a definitive sound that is popular, versatile, simple and instantly recognisable. He has written opera, dance, orchestral, chamber, solo, electronic, film and vocal works, been awarded the Pulitzer Prize and the Rome Prize, and been nominated for Academy and Golden Globe Awards. He teaches at Yale and co-founded one of the world's most commercially successful contemporary music outfits with its own festival and record label attached. In terms of his profile and reach within contemporary American music, in terms of classical/pop-culture crossover, Lang is surely next in line only to Philip Glass.

'In my vocal music, I take a word that has no emotional content, and deploy that word as the doorway to a powerful experience' – David Lang

In the 1980s he helped to set up Bang on a Can, a collective that changed the way generations of New York composers have worked together ever since. He – they – were innovators, shaker-uppers, kick-starters of a musical zeitgeist. If aspects of the classic Bang on a Can house style now feel dated, that doesn't undermine the boldness of the original project or the impact of its legacy.

In recent years Lang has been steadily honing his own music into increasingly fine-sculpted meditation pieces. He's the stylistic heir to Glass, Reich, Pärt and Andriessen, but also to Pérotin and Hildegard: the term 'neo-plainchant' might be the closest description of his hyper-pure vocal writing. He enjoys a paradox, he told me: he's a Jew who makes religious music for Christian stories; a West Coaster whose music epitomises a certain New York sound; an aesthete who writes for Hollywood. 'Religion uses paradoxes all the time,' he pointed out. 'Think of "eternal flame" or "world to come". You can use words to propose paradoxes then project depth into the senselessness. That's what I try to do in my vocal music. I take a word that has no emotional content – a word that has a pre-agreed rational meaning – and deploy that word as the doorway to a powerful experience.'

Lang grew up in Los Angeles, the son of a Lithuanian doctor and a German librarian. 'I'm terrified of actors,' he joked, even though he's approaching a Hollywood A-list himself since writing music for *Requiem for a Dream* and more recently for Paolo Sorrentino films. Lang's film music is uncompromisingly not a backdrop – even though the sound



tends to be stripped back and pristine, it usually serves as the emotional wrench of any scene. This year he was nominated for a Golden Globe for *simple song #3*, the fulcrum of Sorrentino's *Youth*, starring Michael Caine. He was beaten on the night by Sam Smith's theme tune for the latest Bond film. 'I come from LA,' he shrugged, 'so I have a love-hate relationship with that whole world.'

It wasn't movie music but a Shostakovich symphony that caught Lang's ear aged nine and inspired him to start composing. By 13 he was taking intensive lessons with composition teachers at the University of California. To humour his parents he enrolled to study chemistry at Stanford but soon switched to music: 'The chemistry classes were at 8am to weed out people like me,' he later explained. 'Music was at 1pm – so it was no contest.'

In person Lang is droll, softly spoken and inquisitive, a compact man with thick-rimmed round glasses and intense blue eyes. He lives with his wife, the artist Suzanne Bocanegra, on the top floor of a Greenwich Village apartment block with a brightly graffitied street door and no light on the way up several flights of creaky wooden stairs. 'An old-fashioned Soho artist's loft,' he calls it. 'We feel like we are historic re-enactors!'

In the mid-1980s, then a student at Yale, Lang met fellow composers Julia Wolfe and Michael Gordon and sensed a common leaning towards pop-infused, sunny-harmonised, propulsively clangy post-minimalism. After graduating,



LANG FACTS

Born Los Angeles; has lived in New York since the late 1980s
Studied With Hans Werner Henze, among others
Breakthrough Co-founded Bang on a Can in 1987 with composers Julia Wolfe and Michael Gordon, all of whom still co-direct the ensemble
Prize Won the Pulitzer in 2008 for *the little match girl passion*

Wolfe and Gordon got married and all three moved to New York. There, they encountered something of a cultural stand-off: stuffy uptown places like Lincoln Center versus dirty avant-garde jazz bars of the West Village. On the BOAC website, the founders explain that they 'started this organisation because we see making new music as a utopian act'. In 1987 BOAC staged the first of what would become annual marathon concerts. Years later, Lang marvelled that 'we were all packed in together, along with composers John Cage, Steve Reich, Pauline Oliveros, Milton Babbitt, listening to this great music'.

The three Bang on a Can founders have each gone on evolving, with Lang increasingly becoming the glassiest, the sparest, for some listeners the most mannered. Almost all of his recent works have lower-case titles: *man made*; *reason to believe*; *international business machine*; *how to pray*, *for orchestra*. His music seems to be getting leaner and leaner, as if stripping back layers of clutter and searching for some nugget, some essence. 'I'm trying to get rid of things I did when I was younger,' he explained. 'Things I did because music always does them, because careers always have them, because audiences love them.'

He described being an adult composer as purging himself of all of that. 'I've been figuring out what's on the topic and what's off the topic – that's the struggle I've been having for the past 20 years.' And by 'the topic' he means 'an emotion which I am interested in, invested in. How I can use every piece as an opportunity to examine myself. It sounds selfish and it probably is: I feel like I get to spend all this time in the studio examining myself! But if I'm honest with myself, other people will respond because I'm not trying to make them cry or laugh – I'm not manipulating them. The paradox is that if I'm honest with myself, maybe the music can help listeners to be honest with themselves, too.'

In the introduction to a concert series he curated at Carnegie Hall in 2014, Lang wrote that 'we often listen to music as if it has a tale to tell, teasing a narrative out of all the tunes and harmonies and changes'. But, more and more,

Lang's own music seems to be less about narrative, more about creating a space for personal reflection. Even in the works that do overtly tell a story – his setting of Hans Christian Andersen's short story, *the little match girl passion*, or his remake of the Tristan legend in *love fail* – his ultra-crystalline text settings are more about using repetitive sounds and rhythms and pregnant silences to create a sense of ritual and meditation than they are about creating a drama. In both of these particular pieces, the singers add to the ceremony by accompanying themselves on percussion instruments.

'How can I use every piece as an opportunity to examine myself? The paradox is that if I'm honest with myself, maybe the music can help listeners to be honest with themselves, too'

Maybe this is why Lang has become a go-to composer for collective commemorative pieces. This July, the East Neuk Festival premiered Lang's *Memorial Ground*, a new work marking the centenary of the Battle of the Somme and bringing together amateur and professional choirs across the UK to sing crowd- and Google-sourced texts around the theme of remembrance. Other recent projects have included *the whisper opera* at Lincoln Center, in which singers whispered into the ears of the audience, and *crowd out* for 1000 people yelling, performed on a street in Birmingham. For Paolo Sorrentino, the key to Lang's mass appeal is his ability to summon the nub of whatever emotion happens to be required. 'He's able to create music that's very complex,' the director noted, 'but also music that's very accessible while remaining refined and intelligent.' **G**

There are performances of Memorial Ground (co-commissioned by East Neuk Festival and 14-18 NOW) throughout the UK over Remembrance weekend, and in London on November 12; for more information, visit 1418now.org.uk/memorial-ground

DISTILLING DAVID LANG

Windows into an exquisite, post-minimalist sound world



the passing measures

Birmingham Contemporary Music Group

Cantaloupe (7/01)

Process music 'about the struggle to create beauty' for bass clarinet, amplified orchestra and women's voices. A single chord gradually falls over the course of 40 minutes.



the little match girl passion

Theatre of Voices

Harmonia Mundi (1/10)

The quintessential Lang sound, this tender, bleak vocal work won him the Pulitzer Prize in 2008 and is entrancingly sung (and played – the singers ring handbells).



love fail

Anonymous 4

Cantaloupe (10/14)

More poised four-voice *a cappella*, this time with chopped-up texts by Lydia Davis, Marie de France, Gottfried von Strassburg, Béroul, Thomas of Britain and Wagner.

Vocal



Alexandra Coghlan on Gesualdo from the Marian Consort:

'It's the restraint, the careful deployment of expressive colouring and word-painting that gives them their power' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 98



David Fallows on La Rue from the Brabant Ensemble on Hyperion:

'The point is not the obscurity of the repertory so much as that they have chosen superb works' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 95

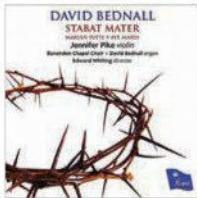
Bednall

Ave Maria^a, Marian Suite^b, Stabat mater^c

ab Jennifer Pike vn ac Benenden Chapel Choir /

Edward Whiting with David Bednall org

Regent © REGCD481 (74' • DDD • T/t)



This is the fourth Regent CD to feature music by David Bednall (b1979), one

of Britain's leading choral composers. The first disc, 'Hail, Gladdening Light' (5/07), was a *Gramophone* Editor's Choice, and I feel that this new release – featuring an entirely Marian-themed programme – will also prove to be a decisive milestone in his compositional development. The centrepiece is a new setting of the *Stabat mater*, first heard in New York last year, which received its UK premiere in June with the artists featured here.

Nearly an hour in duration, the 13th-century sequence is cast in 11 movements, including an important prelude for violin and organ, which identifies several leading motifs. The violin takes a central role: Bednall associates it directly with Mary's sorrow. The work's idiom is immediate and easily digested. Although Bednall specifically refers to Howells's influence in his excellent booklet-note, it is very subtly assimilated and is more obvious in the organ accompaniment, with its scrunchy meanderings over long pedal notes. There is also a strong French flavour (for example in the exquisite 'Eia mater') and the violin's sense of rhapsodic lament – played with passionate intensity by the superb Jennifer Pike – points more to Hebraic chant. The young choristers clearly relish the vividness of Bednall's word-painting. This significant addition will surely be taken up by many of our other crack upper-voice choirs.

Congratulations to the parents of Benenden School's Chapel Choir, who provided funds towards the commission and to Edward Whiting for producing such a polished, vibrant and unforced tonal

blend. With the composer at Tonbridge School Chapel's Marcussen, this can be said to be an authoritative account.

Both the *Marian Suite* for violin and organ and the serene *Ave Maria* were composed especially for this recording. The former is a deftly contrasted triptych and will make a useful addition to the limited violin-and-organ repertory. Strongly recommended. **Malcolm Riley**

L Berkeley • M Berkeley

'Stabat mater'

L Berkeley Stabat mater. Mass for Five Voices.

Judica me **M Berkeley** Touch Light

The Marian Consort; Berkeley Ensemble /

David Wordsworth

Delphian ® DCD34180 (61' • DDD • T/t)

L Berkeley

'Sacred Choral Music'

Batter my heart, three-person'd God^a.

Magnificat^b. Stabat mater^c

Barbara Eysy, Felicity Harrison, Mary Thomas

sops **Maureen Lehane** contr **Nigel Rogers** ten

Christopher Keyte bar **Michael Rippin** bass

Donald Hunt org **Ambrosian Singers;**

BBC Northern Singers; Choirs of St Paul's

Cathedral, Westminster Abbey and Westminster

Cathedral; members of the BBC Northern

Orchestra / Lennox Berkeley; members of the

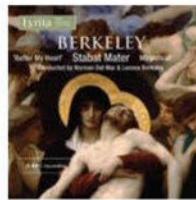
English Chamber Orchestra / Norman Del Mar;

London Symphony Orchestra / Lennox Berkeley

Lyrita mono © REAM1129 (73' • ADD • T/t)

Broadcast performances, ^aOctober 29, 1963;

^bMarch 1, 1965; ^cJuly 8, 1968



The five discs The Marian Consort have so far released focus on music written between the 15th and 17th centuries, so their latest recording of works written between 1947 and 2005 would seem a pretty drastic departure from their usual hunting ground.

But the clue is in their name, and a significant theme running through their

repertory is music devoted to the Blessed Virgin Mary. And you do not get much more Mary-centred than the *Stabat mater*. As David Wordsworth writes in his excellent booklet-notes for the Delphian disc, this 'is without doubt one of Berkeley's finest works'. Its scoring for a dozen instruments (string quartet, double bass, clarinet, bass clarinet, harp and percussion) and six solo voices has no doubt led to its total neglect by the record industry.

The Marian Consort seem to be the first to have made a commercial recording of Berkeley's *Stabat mater* but a performance was broadcast by the BBC on March 1, 1965. That recording has been issued as part of Lyrita's series resurrecting recordings taken by Richard Itter from radio broadcasts between 1952 and 1996. There is a tremendous intensity about this 1965 performance, conducted by Norman Del Mar, but despite a fine line-up of soloists and some fervent playing from members of the ECO, it does not always grasp the essential intimacy of the work in the way that Wordsworth and his Marian Consort do so effectively.

The Marian Consort's background in early music pays dividends in their superb precision of pitch, impeccable rhythmic placing and beautiful diction. These are vividly displayed in the haunting *Mass for Five Voices*, written for Westminster Cathedral, and *Judica me*, commissioned by the Three Choirs Festival to mark the composer's 75th birthday. The lush harmonies that open the latter are sumptuously delivered and beautifully recorded here.

The Lyrita disc also includes a 1963 broadcast of the premiere of Berkeley's cantata *Batter my heart, three-person'd God* under the composer's direction, which unfortunately sounds its age, as well as a splendidly atmospheric recording of his mighty – and, for my money, grossly underappreciated – *Magnificat*, again directed by the composer, with the combined forces of three major London cathedrals. With a lot of help from the all-enveloping



Marian marvels: violinist Jennifer Pike with the Benenden Chapel Choir in David Bednall's *Stabat mater*

St Paul's acoustic, this has a real sense of awe about it.

While the *Lyrita* disc is devoted entirely to Lennox Berkeley, the *Delphian* one includes a short setting for soprano, countertenor and string quartet by his son of his own text (not given with the other texts in the booklet but buried within the booklet-notes). According to Michael Berkeley, *Touch Light* is a deliberate attempt to evoke the 'rapturous love duets' of Monteverdi and Purcell and 'a homage to these masters of early opera'. The musical language is far removed from the 17th century but the sense of great – almost erotic – rapture is beautifully created by Zoë Brookshaw and Rory McCleery in a performance of shimmering intensity.

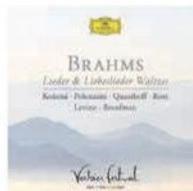
Marc Rochester

Brahms

Liebeslieder-Walzer, Op 52^a. Neue Liebeslieder-Walzer, Op 65^a. Fünf Lieder, Op 94^b. An eine Äolsharfe, Op 19 No 5^c. Botschaft, Op 47 No 1^d. Feldeinsamkeit, Op 86 No 2^c. Immer leiser wird mein Schlummer, Op 105 No 2^c. Das Mädchen spricht, Op 107 No 3^e. Meine Liebe ist grün, Op 63 No 5^d. Unbewegte laue Luft, Op 57 No 8^e. Wie bist du, meine Königin, Op 32 No 9^d. Wir wandelten, Op 96 No 2^e.

^aAndrea Rost sop ^bMagdalena Kožená mez
^cMatthew Polenzani ten ^dThomas Quasthoff bar

James Levine, ^aYefim Bronfman pf
DG 479 6044GH (81' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Verbier Festival, July 30, 2003



Though Brahms's two sets of *Liebeslieder-Walzer* were conceived with the domestic market in mind, they have inevitably attracted starry quartets (not to mention starry pianists) on disc. This new set, recorded at a single Verbier concert some 13 years ago and including a clutch of songs for each member of the quartet, concedes nothing in star power, even if two of the singers, Andrea Rost and Matthew Polenzani, are arguably better known in opera than in *Lieder*.

Both *Liebeslieder* sets benefit from a real sense of relaxed, spur-of-the-moment music-making, with, one senses, James Levine and Yefim Bronfman sharing the driving seat, keeping the faster numbers urgent and vigorous, and allowing plenty of time in the slower numbers. Their top-quality pianism really lets us hear a wealth of delightful detail.

The quartet themselves make an appealingly lively sound, less euphonious

perhaps than DG's earlier Mathis-Fassbaender-Schreier-DFD line-up or, particularly, EMI's perfectly matched 1994 quartet of Bonney, von Otter, Streit and Bär. Here we have the firm foundations of Thomas Quasthoff's appealingly open, purring bass-baritone, with the inner parts filled by Matthew Polenzani's bright, buzzy tenor and Magdalena Kožená's rich, colourful mezzo. Andrea Rost is perhaps a little disappointing, though: her timbre is so highly buffed on its surface that you get little sense of the grain beneath, and the words are under-projected.

Quasthoff and especially Kožená are strongest in their solo selections, the mezzo's three songs distinguished by her plangent tone and slightly shimmering vibrato. Polenzani sings with pleasingly ardent tone, but doesn't sound entirely relaxed or totally idiomatic in the difficult opening spot.

The sound is lively and clear, placing the pianos – easily distinguishable from one another – at the front. A fun, well-filled disc. **Hugo Shirley**

Liebeslieder, Neue Liebeslieder – selected comparisons:
Mathis, Fassbaender, Schreier, Fischer-Dieskau, Engel,
Sawallisch (6/83^R, 12/88) (DG) 423 133-2GH
Bonney, von Otter, Streit, Bär, Deutsch, Forsberg
(10/95) (EMI) 555430-2



MATTHIAS GOERNE

BERIO . SINFONIA
MAHLER/BERIO . 10 FRÜHE LIEDER
THE SYNERGY VOCALS
BBC SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
JOSEP PONS



CD HMC 902180

Luciano Berio in the light of Mahler.

'It seems to me that Mahler has the whole history of music in his care', wrote Berio in 1978, ten years after producing the supreme masterpiece *Sinfonia*. Logically enough, since its patchwork-like third movement is a monument to the glory of the emblematic figure of post-Romanticism, but also of other great symphonists of history. A few years later, Berio went on to orchestrate a number of songs on texts from *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (which Mahler had scored for piano and voice) – as if they had been written at the time of the *Kindertotenlieder*! A symphonic backcloth tailor-made for a great baritone voice like that of Matthias Goerne.



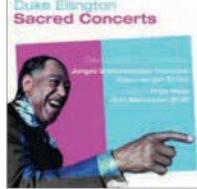
Love songs in three-time for four: Andrea Rost, Magdalena Kožená, Matthew Polenzani, Thomas Quasthoff and pianist James Levine (review page 95)

Ellington

Sacred Concerts

Claudia Burghard mez **Joachim Rust** bar **Gary Winters** spkr **Junges Vokalensemble Hannover;** **Big Band Fette Hupe / Jörn Marcussen-Wulff,** **Klaus-Jürgen Etzold**

Rondeau Production © ROP6112 (71' • DDD • T)



What we need at this point in the game – especially as Duke Ellington's Third Sacred Concert, recorded in Westminster Abbey in 1973, the John Alldis Choir joining forces with the Ellington Orchestra, has never made the CD upgrade – is a thorough reassessment on record of Ellington's three Sacred Concerts, work that the Duke himself considered to be his most significant compositional legacy. The first Sacred Concert appeared in 1965 and, like its 1968 and 1973 follow-ups, assembled devotional material in suite form. But, like the Seattle Repertory Jazz Orchestra for its 2006 release 'Sacred Music of Duke Ellington' on the Origin label, the leaders of the Hanover-based big band Fette Hupe ('Fat Horn') have pieced together a composite programme that copies and

pastes material from various of the concerts, while Ellington's regal hymn theme 'Come Sunday' was intoned originally by Mahalia Jackson as the spiritual hub of his 1958 extended suite *Black, Brown and Beige*.

Individual pieces such as the ravishing 'Come Sunday' or 'Something about believing', which has sheer joy sprinting through its harmonic veins, or the raw-toothed funk of 'The Shepherd' are all marvellous, but out of context cannot muster quite the same structural integrity. Ellington himself was, it's true enough, an inveterate recycler. But his Second Sacred Concert was artfully pieced together as a self-balancing form with tightly worked riff-based compositions like 'The biggest and busiest intersection' contrasting with 'Supreme being', a representation of chaos which persistently crumbles into disembodied choral Sprechstimme and instrumental soliloquies.

The material Fette Hupe presents unfolds, instead, as a mere sequence of numbers, but I've no complaints at all about the playing or singing. A hard-driven piece such as 'Ain't but the one', a close harmonic cousin of 'I ain't what you do (it's the way that you do it)', swings rampantly, while 'In the beginning God' takes a considered look at Ellington's

expanded, multi-dimensional episodic structure. Conductor Jörn Marcussen-Wulff steers an intelligent middle-path between invoking the ghosts of Ellington's orchestra and re-sparking the inner fire of this music by trusting his own musicians' improvisational energies. Singers Claudia Burghard and Joachim Rust – tap dancer Felix Petry too – project powerfully and with unaffected soul. **Philip Clark**

Fauré

'The Complete Songs, Vol 1'

Cinq Mélodies 'de Venise', Op 58^a. Le jardin clos, Op 106^b. Poème d'un jour, Op 21^c. Le papillon et la fleur, Op 1 No 1^a. Mai, Op 1 No 2^a. Dans les ruines d'une abbaye, Op 2 No 1^c. Les matelots, Op 2 No 2^c. Sérénade toscane (O tu che dormie riposata stai), Op 3 No 2^d. Chanson du pêcheur (Lamento), Op 4 No 1^e. Lydia, Op 4 No 2^f. Tristesse, Op 6 No 2^g. Sylvie, Op 6 No 3^g. Après un rêve (Levati sol que la luna è levata), Op 7 No 1^g. Nell, Op 18 No 1^g. Le voyageur, Op 18 No 2^g. Les berceaux, Op 23 No 1^g. La fée aux chansons, Op 27 No 2^h. Aurore, Op 39 No 1^h. Arpège, Op 76 No 2^h. Fleur jetée, Op 39 No 2^h. Vocalises - No 20^h; No 29^h

^a**Lorna Anderson**, ^b**Janis Kelly**, ^c**Joan Rodgers** sopns
^d**Ann Murray** mez ^e**Iestyn Davies** counterten
^f**Ben Johnson** ten ^g**John Chest**, ^h**Nigel Cliffe** bars

Malcolm Martineau pf

Signum © SIBCD427 (77' • DDD • T/t)



Malcolm Martineau's survey of Fauré's songs follows on from his fine Poulenc series, also for Signum. This is also the second time he has recorded the composer's mélodies complete, and the new cycle is markedly different in approach from its predecessor, released by CRD in the mid-1990s. On that occasion, the songs were divided between two singers, Tom Krause and Sarah Walker; here, he uses no fewer than eight, all of them carefully chosen, and all leaving their own very personal imprint on their material.

Martineau begins at the beginning with 'Le papillon et la fleur', Op 1 No 1, written in 1861 and sung by Ann Murray. Rather than adopting strict chronology, however, he then ranges liberally through Fauré's career, though the programme is structured around three songs-cycles – *Poème d'un jour* (1878), the *Cinq Mélodies 'de Venise'* (1891) and the sparse yet erotic *Le jardin clos* from 1915. In her only contribution to the disc, Joan Rodgers sings the last of these with great sensual refinement and a keen sensitivity to line and text. Murray, her artistry wonderfully fresh despite an occasional hardness of tone, brings elegant wit to the Venetian songs: 'Mandoline' is very skittish, 'En sourdine' wonderfully rapt. The real revelation, though, comes from the American baritone John Chest, whose performance of *Poème d'un jour* blends superb dynamic control – his high *mezza voce* is remarkable – with deep commitment, flawless phrasing and an easy warmth of tone.

The individual songs that make up the rest of the disc are given sharp focus through the complex interplay of different voice types. So Chest's youthful-sounding ardour in 'Les matelots' and 'Dans les ruines d'une abbaye' offsets gritty-voiced fellow baritone Nigel Cliffe's utterly compelling if occasionally unsteady 'Chanson du pêcheur'. The heightened drama with which Janis Kelly delivers the curiously violent 'Fleur jetée' contrasts with Lorna Anderson's rapt introversion in 'Les berceaux', while Murray's knowing refinement throws into relief the deep, sweet melancholy of Iestyn Davies's 'Tristesse'.

Ben Johnson, meanwhile, is very svelte in 'Sérénade toscane' and 'Nell'. He has too little to do here, as do Cliffe and Davies, which future releases in the series will hopefully rectify, and one hopes we will also hear more of John Chest. Martineau's playing, beautiful and fastidiously detailed,

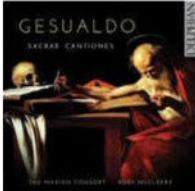
is, of course, the unifying factor: few have quite such an innate understanding of the way in which the smallest gestures of colour and nuance expose the depths of emotion in Fauré's work. It all forms a most engaging start to the series: I look forward to the rest of it. **Tim Ashley**

Gesualdo

Sacrae cantiones, Book 1

The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery

Delphian (CD) DCD34176 (61' • DDD • T/t)



Such is the musical mythology that has grown up around Carlo Gesualdo that it's impossible to discuss his music without mentioning that he was also a double murderer with a penchant for flagellation. But what's more interesting is the effect that this lurid biography has had on contemporary reactions to the composer's music. It's easy to draw a connection between bloody deeds, overwhelming guilt and the twisted, tortured harmonies of certain works. The result is a recording catalogue disproportionately dominated by the madrigals and *Tenebrae Responsories*, all but ignoring the two volumes of motets, whose more conservative style doesn't fit with the story.

The Marian Consort's latest release goes some way to redressing this balance, putting the focus on Gesualdo's first volume of motets. Scored for five voices, these are even less familiar than the six-voice second volume, and have received only two notable recordings in recent years (in 1993 by the Oxford Camerata and in 2014 by the all-male ensemble Odhecaton). The works of the *liber primus* owe as much to the *prima pratica* tradition of Palestrina as they do to more programmatic, madrigalian writing. And it's precisely this restraint, the careful deployment of expressive colouring and word-painting that gives them their power – each gesture more telling for its comparative rarity.

These are impeccable performances, easily the finest on record, the single voices of Rory McCleery's ensemble delivering a vertical textural clarity lacking in both of the earlier discs without sacrificing horizontal blend and balance. The generous acoustic of Merton Chapel adds warmth and bloom without letting things get too blowsy. Musically it's no surprise that Gesualdo is at his best in penitential works – 'Hei mihi', 'Laboravi in gemitu', 'O vos omnes' – but more surprising is the delicacy and the unexpected (and

emotionally devastating) moments of chiaroscuro optimism that colour even the darkest texts. It's the major-key suggestions of 'Peccantem me quotidie' that slay, not the stabbing suspensions. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Comparative versions:

Odhecaton, Da Col (11/14) (RICE) RIC343

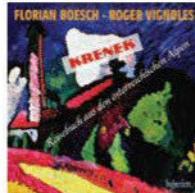
Oxford Camerata, Summerly (NAXO) 8 550742

Krenek · Zemlinsky

Krenek Reisebuch aus den österreichischen Alpen, Op 62 Zemlinsky In der Ferne. Die schlanke Wasserlilie. Waldgespräch. Wandl' ich im Wald des Abends

Florian Boesch bar Roger Vignoles pf

Hyperion (CD) CDA68158 (59' • DDD • T/t)



Ernst Krenek wrote his *Reisebuch* – the text as well as the music – in a few weeks in the summer of 1929, shortly after making the Alpine journey that inspired it. Though comparatively few singers have tackled it, it ranks among the finest of 20th-century song-cycles, a wide-ranging, complex work, rich in emotional and political resonances. In essence, it's a meditation on the state of interwar Europe that revisits the landscapes of Austro-German Romanticism and observes their decline with a mixture of sardonic objectivity, sorrow and pre-absurdist humour. The Alps are awash with tourists 'seeing nothing, because they must write postcards' (Krenek himself is one of their number, which deepens the irony): a cemetery admits the prurient to its charnel house for a fee, while the inhabitants of a monastery turn out to be surreptitious drinkers. Near the midpoint, the viewpoint widens as the evocation of a distant 'bloody clown' (Hitler) reminds us of the growing threat to fragile democratic certainties.

The score is comparably allusive, poring over musical tradition while seeking to extend it. There are repeated echoes of Schubert, Schumann and Mendelssohn, though Krenek cannily avoids direct quotation. The piano writing, meanwhile, sometimes takes on polyphonic overtones that peer back through Brahms to Bach. The harmonic language can be harsh: Krenek keeps within the bounds of tonality but irony and anger often lead to dissonances as fierce as anything in Schoenberg or Berg.

Florian Boesch and Roger Vignoles gave a revelatory performance of the work at the Wigmore Hall in January 2015, returning to it in the studio last October, and it would be fair to say that Boesch has done nothing finer on disc. This is exceptional



Rediscovering Gesualdo's rare motets: The Marian Consort

Lieder singing, fusing line, text and dynamics into an indivisible whole, all of it delivered with a conversational intimacy that is often breathtaking. The emotional ambivalences are finely projected, as sadness, dismay and anger are repeatedly undercut by self-deprecating wit and humour. The final song equates travel and wandering with the essential rootlessness of the human condition: Boesch sings it in a mood of resigned calm, beneath which one still detects a last quizzical twinkle of irony. Vignoles, meanwhile, matches his every shift of mood with playing of great control, refinement and subtlety. It's an outstanding achievement and hard to follow, but as a filler there are four early songs by Zemlinsky at his most darkly Romantic, all of them quite beautifully done. **Tim Ashley**

Langgaard

Eight Emil Rittershaus Songs.

Fünf Lieder. Five Erotic Poems

Jens Krogsgaard ten Jan Ole Christiansen pf
Danacord © DACOCD771 (58' • DDD • T/t)



Straight off the back of Paul von Klenau's Ninth Symphony (Dacapo, 7/16), it's

good to be in the company of a composer of conviction, personality and charm, for all his faults. If you're a Langgaard detractor you'll have your reasons. But in these fresh and direct songs, the composer's voice never fails to ring true.

The booklet contains neither composition dates nor BVN numbers but **langgaard.dk** tells us that the eight songs with texts by Rittershaus date from 1909-13 and are performed in chronological order here. Schumann is a model but by the time of 'Das Auge' (1911) Langgaard was throwing those unprepared modulations and apocalyptic chord sequences into his ultra-Romantic piano accompaniments. We get even more of that in the last of this selection, 'Mit hellen Augen' (1913). Wagner's influence bubbles up in the concise *Fünf Lieder* (1914), setting texts by Eichendorff and Heine, but again Langgaard's railing passions always lift him above pale imitation.

Two 'effects' in the Danish-Norwegian Vilhelm Krag settings *Fem erotiske digte* ('Five Erotic Poems', 1915) don't quite come off: the rippling stream of 'Og etter jeg' and the mandolin in 'Serenade'. But the latter song draws most character from Jens Krogsgaard, who in these close recordings often sounds too restricted in volume and character, shy of whispering

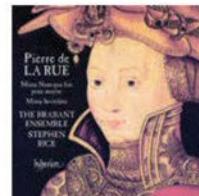
intimacy and sometimes forced at the top of his voice. What sounds like added reverb makes his consonants hiss, a sting in the tail when so many final consonants are placed emphatically. There's moody, rhapsodic playing from Jan Ole Christiansen but again the close recording renders it thin and tinny. In the piano postscript to 'Mit hellen Augen' we hear Krogsgaard clearing his throat and other noises off. Fine music, which deserves more care than this. **Andrew Mellor**

La Rue

Magnificat sexti toni. Missa Inviolata. Missa Nuncqua fue pena mayor. Salve regina VI

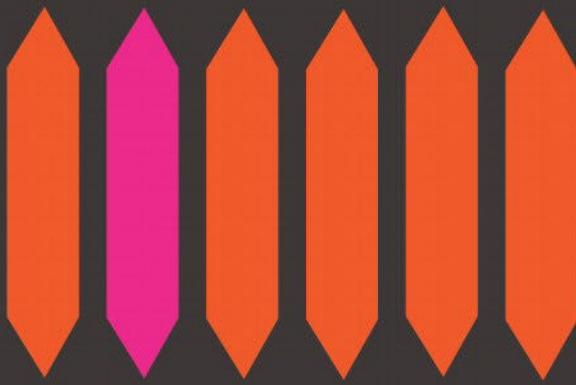
The Brabant Ensemble / Stephen Rice

Hyperion © CDA68150 (79' • DDD • T/t)

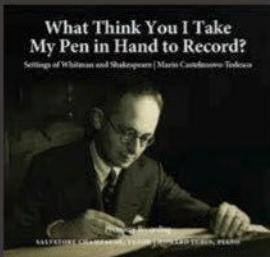


After 10 years of recordings with Hyperion, Stephen Rice and The Brabant Ensemble can look back on a truly enviable catalogue, contributing substantially to the availability of 16th-century polyphony in recordings of a really high quality. Their ensemble here, four men and four women, is not only entirely unlike what any 16th-century choir would have been but

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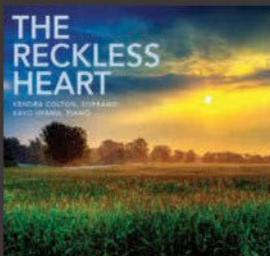
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SALVATORE CHAMPAGNE, TENOR
HOWARD LUBIN, PIANO



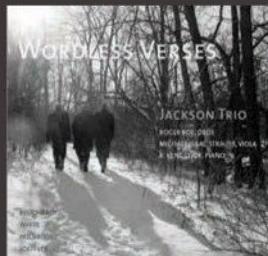
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Cappella Murensis and Les Cornets Noirs perform music by Emperor Leopold I on Audite

seems on the face of it quite unsuited to the music they perform. On the other hand, these are all such marvellous musicians, and so beautifully controlled by Rice, that nothing in the music seems lost or compromised.

As in most of their other recordings, they have concentrated on a single composer and on works that have never been recorded: so far as I can see, only one of them has been recorded before, and that a long time ago. But the point is not the obscurity of the repertory so much as that they have chosen superb works. And it must be stressed that – purely in terms of the number of copies of his works that survive in 16th-century sources – Pierre de la Rue is second only to Josquin.

The *Missa Nuncqua fue pena mayor* is based on one of the loveliest of all 15th-century songs, by the Fleming Wreede who made a career for himself in Spain under the name Urrede. Its most characteristic feature is its painful Phrygian E modality, to match the unredeemed sadness of the text. But oddly La Rue ends all movements but the last on G (and one is inclined to think that the last suffers from a transmission problem). The *Missa Inviolata* is a highly resourceful work, far more varied than the other, closing with one of

the most glorious of La Rue's *Agnus* settings. But the disc ends with the biggest surprise of all, the *Magnificat sexti toni*, bursting with energy and variety. Once again, then, a stunningly satisfying and innovative disc from The Brabant Ensemble. **David Fallows**

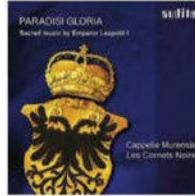
Leopold I

Missa pro defunctis. Motetto de Septem Doloribus Beatae Mariae Virginis, 'Vertatur in luctum cythara nostra'. Stabat mater.

Lection prima: Nocturni pro defunctis Piae Claudio Felici

Cappella Murensis; Les Cornets Noirs / Johannes Strobl

Audite © AUDITE97 540 (76' • DDD • T)



Emperor Leopold I (1640-1705) was one of the most musically minded of the Habsburg Holy Roman Emperors. His cultivation of Italianate musical culture in Vienna included the employment of Cesti, Draghi, Bononcini and Conti; he also advanced the careers of native composers Schmelzer, Kerll and Fux. The emperor was also an able composer, and a recent

recording of *Il lutto dell'universo* (Fra Bernardo) represented his interest in the sacred dramatic *sepolcri*, whereas the combined forces of Les Cornets Noirs, Cappella Murensis and Johannes Strobl explore some of Leopold's liturgical music.

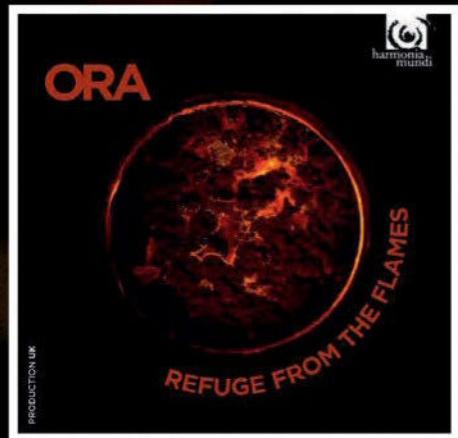
A four-part *Stabat mater* in B minor (1678) is an episodic setting that offers plangent contrapuntal gestures, performed with consummate skill by the fine company of soloists (forming a *coro favorito*), with the doleful texture swollen by two extra ripieno singers on each part from time to time. The assorted instrumentalists and the choir demonstrate their collective sense of musical shapeliness in the *Missa pro defunctis* (1673), composed by Leopold for the funerary exequies of his first wife (and niece) Margarita Teresa of Spain (the occasion also featured Requiems by Bertali and Schmelzer). The *Nocturni pro defunctis* (1676) is one of three substantial lections Leopold wrote for the burial service of his second wife, the Tyrolean princess Claudia Felicitas – and it was also performed at his own funeral in 1705.

Broadly speaking, these larger works emulate the Venetian style of polychoral textures, solo monodic passages and *concertato* instrumental sections (played excellently by cornettos, trombones, violas



ORA SUZI DIGBY

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Refuge From The Flames

Following the stunning success of their debut release 'Upheld by Stillness', Suzi Digby's all-star vocal ensemble ORA presents their new album: 'Refuge from the Flames'.

Dedicated to the legacy of Girolamo Savonarola, 15th century Dominican friar and religious reformer, this new release furthers ORA's aim to showcase classic masterpieces of Renaissance choral music alongside reflections from contemporary composers. The musicians of ORA bring with them a wealth of choral experience that we hope show these pieces, both new and old, as the stunning works of art that they truly are.

'We begin and end this second ORA album with two contrasting settings of the Miserere mei (Psalm 50, Vulgate). Over the centuries this text has inspired reflections by many Christian writers, none more influential than those by Girolamo Savonarola, and we have devoted much of this album to his extraordinary legacy. Central to the recording is Savonarola's meditation on the psalm, Infelix Ego, written shortly before his execution. We present it here in William Byrd's justly famous setting, and in a newly commissioned masterpiece by the Latvian composer Ēriks Ešenvalds.' - Suzi Digby OBE



'Warming the texture with soft Flemish-tinged vowel sounds': Utopia have recorded Morales's Seven Lamentations on Etcetera

da gamba, violone, archlute and organ). The widower's personal grief in the final movement of the lection is shared compassionately by Lisandro Abadie accompanied by a consort of viols, who are responded to by chromatically rising choral lamentations until they resolve eloquently.

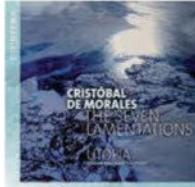
David Vickers

Morales

The Seven Lamentations

Utopia

Etcetera F KTC1538 (63' • DDD • T)



Founded just a year ago, Utopia are among the proliferating number of young ensembles to combine a softer continental sound with steely accuracy in one-part Renaissance polyphony. The result, according to their tag-line, is 'Belgian handmade polyphony'. The singers have between them a respectable heritage including the Collegium Vocale Gent, Netherlands Bach Society and Huelgas Ensemble, to name but a few, and in terms of sound they are similar

to the ensemble Beauty Farm, with whom they share two singers.

This debut disc, launched via a crowdfunding campaign, presents Cristóbal de Morales's complete Seven Lamentations. Described by the Spanish theorist Juan Bermudo in 1555 as 'the light of Spain in music', Morales was the first Spanish composer to enjoy a true international reputation, being compared favourably to the Flemish composers Adrian Willaert and Nicolas Gombert. Stylistically Morales retains a Spanish flavour to the fulness of his polyphony, especially in sonorous homophonic passages, but blends this with the contrapuntal weaving of Low Countries composers and shades of Palestrina. His Lamentations are less immediately yearning than are, say, Lobo's later settings yet they are peppered with ravishing passages to which the singers respond eagerly. Listen for *Nun. Vigilavit iugum iniquitatum mearum* to hear voices and composer run an impressive gamut of expression while maintaining delicate intimacy.

A relatively recent recording of three sections of these Lamentations by The Brabant Ensemble (Hyperion, 11/08) calls

for a comparison. As Fabrice Fitch observed, The Brabant Ensemble have a high 'centre of acoustic gravity' in Renaissance polyphony (Jacquet of Mantua review, 6/15) which I feel lends sheen to their sound. Utopia, conversely, have a much lower centre of gravity yet maintain similar clarity while simultaneously warming the texture with soft Flemish-tinged vowel sounds. The results are beautiful, intimate and thoroughly engaging.

Edward Breen

Nordqvist · Tegnér

'Sång, vår sång!'

Nordqvist Davids 23:dje psalm. Sång, vår sång!.

Bed, att det dagas. Davids 100:de psalm.

Allenast i Gud. Lovsång. Sommarvisa.

Liljekonvaljer. Skåden liljorna. I juletid.

Jul, jul, strålande jul. Betlehemstjärnan

Tegnér Loven Gud i himmelshöjd. Salig, ja salig.

Trettondagshymn. Långfredagsmotett. Herren

är min herde. Ur Dexippos. Saliga. Herdarna

spela för barnet Jesus. Betlehem stjärna. En

hymn till stjärnen

Danderyds Vocal Ensemble / Rikard Karlsson with

Ida Falk Winland sop **Anders Ölund org**

Katarina Lindgren db **Stenhammar Quartet**

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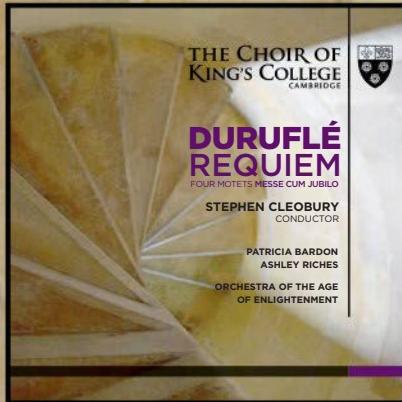
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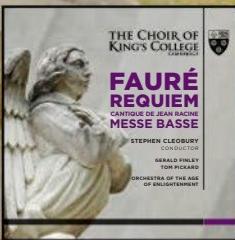
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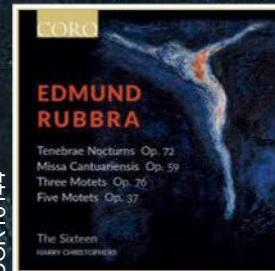
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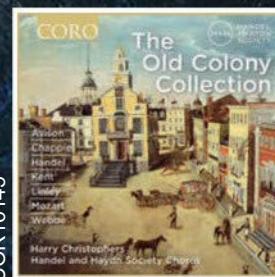


COR16144

Edmund Rubbra
The Sixteen

Harry Christophers

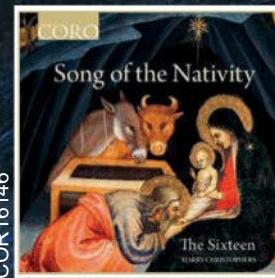
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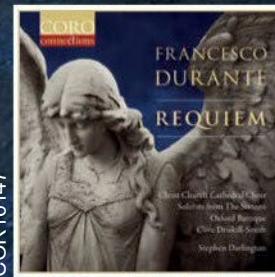
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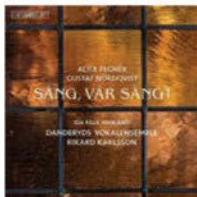
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Liturgical music by two Swedish organist-composers, one born in 1864, the other

22 years later. Both worked around Stockholm but Gustaf Nordqvist (the younger) was the more cosmopolitan, without a domineering husband to contend with and able to study in Berlin despite his humble roots relative to the well-to-do Alice Tegnér.

Listening to the liturgical works for combination of choir, soprano soloist, string quintet and organ assembled here, you might think it the other way around. None of this music was designed to rock any boats but Tegnér's is more scented and poetic, Nordqvist's a touch more parochial. Both write simply, with occasional charm but endearing naivety. Comparing their settings of Psalm 23, neither is adventurous but Tegnér's has more soul. She uses chromatics to communicate something human and heartfelt, as in the rather charming *Loven Gud i himmelshöjd* that opens.

In both those pieces the 23 trained but voluntary voices of Danderyds Vokalensemble – a sort of Swedish answer to the Choir of St Luke's, Chelsea – shape the stanzas astutely under Rikard Karlsson in order to push these little strophic journeys forwards. They sing with that characteristic Nordic blend and purity, with good vowel harmony but a slightly looser respect for consonants. When the perfectly cast voice of soloist Ida Falk Winland breaks out on top or the warm strings of the Stenhammar Quartet and bassist Katarina Lindgren settle underneath, the effect is gorgeous.

One familiar work is Nordqvist's *Jul, jul, strålande jul*, a feature of some Nine Lessons and Carols services down the years. If Stephen Cleobury or anybody else wants to show that you don't have to commission multiple female composers to address the gender imbalance on such occasions, they might lend an ear to Tegnér's *Herdarna spelar för barnet Jesus*, where she taps just a little mystery and wonder once more. **Andrew Mellor**

Schubert

'Der Wanderer'

Am Strom, D539. An eine Quelle, D530. Auf dem Wasser zu singen, D774. Auf der Donau, D553. Aus 'Heliopolis' II, D754. Lied eines Schiffers an die Dioskuren, D360. Der Musensohn, D764. Rastlose Liebe, D138. Der Schiffer, D536. Der Schiffer, D694. Der Wanderer,

D489. Willkommen und Abschied, D767. Der Wanderer an den Mond, D870. Wandrers Nachtlied, D768. Schwanengesang, D957 – No 1, Liebesbotschaft; No 2, Kriegers Ahnung; No 3, Frühlingssehnsucht; No 4, Ständchen; No 5, Aufenthalt; No 6, In der Ferne; No 7, Abschied
Roderick Williams bar Iain Burnside pf
Delphian F DCD34170 (73' • DDD • T/t)



This disc might start with a bang, Iain Burnside welcoming us on board with a firm jolt at the start of 'Wilkommen und Abscheid', but it soon settles into a more mellow vein as befits Schubert's various wanderers. 'For much as Lieder audiences enjoy the occasional comic song or upbeat number,' writes Roderick Williams in his own booklet essay, 'the real crux of the affair comes in the heartache, in the heartbreak and the fall of tears.'

There's certainly plenty of that here, but there's also variety, as the nicely planned programme takes us from landlocked wanderings towards water – an element whose endless expanses, untold depths and relentless movement offer rich metaphorical pickings for Schubert's poets. At the centre of it all we have the Rellstab songs from *Schwanengesang*; it's good to hear them in a different context than that into which they were posthumously thrust by an opportunistic publisher.

The performances throughout are in many ways difficult to fault. Williams is an unfailingly intelligent singer and is matched every step of the way by Burnside. Interpretatively they barely put a foot wrong, although I detect a slight tendency towards the leisurely at times – 'Kriegers Ahnung' doesn't work itself up as it sometimes does, and there could be more swing and swagger to 'Musensohn'. The flipside of that coin, though, is a lovely softness to the final verse of 'In der Ferne' and an appealing gentleness to 'Abschied'.

As the disc progresses, though, one notices that Williams's voice – light-coloured and liquid – can't quite muster the timbral variety of the most compelling singers in the repertoire. And is his way with the language occasionally a little polite, English even? Minor quibbles: this is an enjoyable – and beautifully recorded – programme. **Hugo Shirley**

Stravinsky

Ave Maria. Cantata^a. Credo. Mass. Pater noster. Tres Sacrae cantiones (after Gesualdo)
^a**Ruby Hughes sop Nicholas Mulroy ten Choir of**

St Mary's Cathedral, Edinburgh; Scottish Chamber Orchestra Soloists / Duncan Ferguson
Delphian F DCD34164 (60' • DDD • T/t)



This logically planned programme is beautifully sung and blessed with outstandingly vivid recorded sound. We are brought close to the performers in an attractively resonant space, the best of both worlds for religious or quasi-religious fare in which clarity matters as much as atmosphere.

Disingenuous as ever when discussing his Mass, Stravinsky declared Mozart the compositional trigger and liturgical use his goal, notwithstanding the work's antiquarian style, vocal complexity and unorthodox instrumentation. Under the direction of Duncan Ferguson lines are more tautly drawn than in Leonard Bernstein's unexpected English Bach Festival outing of 1977. Stravinsky, who wanted children's voices for both the soprano and alto parts, would surely have appreciated the expertise of the Choir of St Mary's Cathedral. The first such UK institution to allow girls to join boys as trebles, it has also had female altos singing alongside its countertenors for a decade. Nevertheless, the step-out soloists for the haunting *Gloria* are a boy treble and a not unattractively tremulous male alto. Only the *Agnus Dei* brings momentary doubts, the alert, almost mechanistic articulation precluding the pious wonder of an older, slower, blurrier time. Still, this might just be the sound Stravinsky imagined in his mind's ear.

A recent rival, the all-adult RIAS Chamber Choir under Daniel Reuss, not only appends the problematic Cantata but also finds room for *Les noces*. In Edinburgh the makeweights are less ambitious. While the ubiquitous motets are crisply turned, subtler or more Russian performances can be found elsewhere. The Gesualdo 'completions', on the other hand, will be less familiar and collectors who set great store by such things may find Delphian's presentation superior to Harmonia Mundi's. There are full texts and translations, and Gabriel Jackson's detailed notes do not dodge the composer's political insensitivities. For the central arioso of his Cantata, Stravinsky insisted on setting the unpurgated historic text of 'Tomorrow shall be my dancing day', with results both hermetic and interminable. The choice was made on the basis of aesthetics rather than anti-Semitism but the morality of such

insistently abstract thinking looks doubtful as the world once again ‘turns on its dark side’. Delphian’s cover art is appropriately sombre. Strongly recommended despite a certain lack of rapture in the forthright choral delivery. **David Gutman**

Mass, Cantata – selected comparison:

Sols, RIAS Chbr Ch, *musikFabrik*, Reuss
(9/06^R) (HARM) HMG50 1913

Mass – selected comparisons:

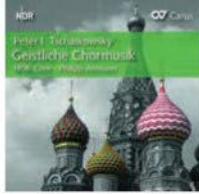
English Bach Fest Chor & Orch, Trinity Boys’ Ch, Bernstein
(2/78^R) (DG) 423 251-2GC

English Bach Fest Chor & Orch, Trinity Boys’ Ch, Bernstein
(IDEA) DVD 308 5308

Tchaikovsky

Nine Sacred Pieces. Liturgy of St John Chrysostom, Op 41 – No 6, Cherubic Hymn; No 10, We hymn thee; No 11, It is truly fitting; No 13, The Lord’s Prayer. The Angel Cried Out
NDR Choir / Philipp Ahmann

Carus (F) CARUS83 338 (59' • DDD • T/t)



This anthology of Tchaikovsky’s sacred music is a valuable addition to the catalogue, containing as it does material from the composer’s 1884–85 and 1878 collections as well as four selections from the already well-known Liturgy from 1878. It shows Tchaikovsky experimenting with a number of musical styles in the quest for an appropriate sacred language. It is decidedly odd to hear the three settings of the *Cherubic Hymn* one after the other, but at least this means that the listener can hear these stylistic explorations very clearly.

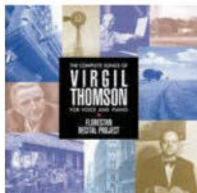
The choir really enjoy the more dramatic settings, such as the magnificent ‘Blazhenni yazhe izbral’ and ‘Nyne sily nebesniya’, the magnificent *Cherubic Hymn* from the complete Liturgy and the exultant 1887 setting of *Angel vopiyashe*, but elsewhere I feel that they are somewhat compromised by the rather unforgiving studio acoustics. Low basses are certainly in evidence, however, and certainly do something to counter this problem by anchoring the sound, and Ahmann paces the music very well indeed. I’d really like to hear the choir perform this music live, in a church with decent acoustics.

Two small details: it is entirely bizarre, and incorrect, to sing ‘I vsekh i vsya’ at the end of ‘Dostoyno est’ – it is a choral response to the priest’s petition, not part of the text of the hymn; and to translate ‘blazhenni’ as ‘fortunate’ rather than ‘blessed’ is a decided theological stretch.

Ivan Moody

Thomson

‘The Complete Songs of Virgil Thomson for Voice and Piano’
Sarah Pelletier sop Lynne McMurtry contr William Hite ten Aaron Engebreth bar Alison d’Amato, Linda Osborn pf John McDonald perc
New World (F) 80775-2 (3h 18' • DDD • T/t)



‘Virgil Thomson’s composing gift has never relied on interesting ideas, but on the uses to which dull ideas can be put,’ wrote Ned Rorem some 45 years ago. Rorem, like so many other observers, critics and casual listeners, was struggling to put his finger on the paradox of Thomson’s music: its seeming simplicity, its striking effectiveness and its aesthetic resilience in an age when other composers were celebrated for being abstract or intellectually daring.

This set, performed by four sturdy singers, two pianists and a percussionist, surveys Thomson’s output for voice, from unpublished songs written while he was a student at Harvard in the early 1920s to work written as pendants to or preparatory essays for his operas, as well as many occasional pieces throughout his career (which stretched into the 1980s). It also includes some extended works, including the ‘Oraison funèbre de Henriette-Marie-de-France’, which amounts to a solo cantata for tenor, and the *Mass for Solo Voice*, written in 1960, an almost-10-minute work that reveals Thomson indulging a more astringently contemporary sound.

The singers don’t have the same charisma as the singers on an earlier album from Albany, which included 25 of Thomson’s songs, but all of them are skillful and alert to the need for perfect clarity in the enunciation of Thomson’s meticulous prosody. Baritone Aaron Engebreth is the strongest, and his rendition of the *Five Songs from William Blake* is a highlight of the collection. Soprano Sarah Pelletier can be a bit thin in the upper reaches of the voice, and there is occasional slight hint of strain from tenor William Hite during higher *forte* passages. But none of these reservations diminishes the substantial pleasure of hearing these works, and hearing them in the context of Thomson’s extended career.

The early songs can be fussy – too French in a self-conscious way. Thomson, who idolised Satie and studied with Boulanger, comes into his own as a songwriter after discovery of the infantilised doggerel of Gertrude Stein, whose

nonsense encouraged his natural tendency to make things limpid and lilting. A casual listener might deduce that Thomson was a pious man, given to sentimentality; but he seems drawn to sacred or quasi-sacred texts, and trivial ones full of domestic emotions, mainly because they fired his musical creativity. The further the poem resides from Thomson’s own inclinations, the more he seemed inspired by it.

Thomson, and biographers, have made much of his Kansas roots; but after listening to these songs through several times and paying close attention to the texts, one senses that Kansas was, for him, merely a robust source of Rorem’s ‘dull ideas’, to which he could apply his creative and ironic energies.

But just when you think Thomson was a cynical manipulator of threadbare Americana, he comes up with something so simple and lovely that you can’t be sure of your own suspicions. This set is full of these moments, especially a generous selection of lullabies, written as gifts to friends who had recently had children. Lasting a minute or less, these lullabies seem to contain everything that is enigmatic about Thomson in concentrated form: his lyrical gift, his economy of means and his complicated relationship to simplicity and innocence. They make this collection worth the investment, even if many of the more familiar songs and song sets have been performed better elsewhere.

Philip Kennicott

Vivaldi

‘Les Orphelines de Venise’
Kyrie, RV587. Gloria, RV589. Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro, RV169. Credo, RV591. Concerto madrigalesco, RV129. Magnificat, RV610
Les Cris de Paris / Geoffroy Jourdain

Ambronay (F) AMY047 (64' • DDD • T/t)



For aeons Andrew Parrott’s version (Virgin, 1/95) was the only noteworthy recording of Vivaldi’s popular Gloria (RV589) that used an all-female choir. Hot on the heels of Hervé Niquet’s spirited but eccentric interpretation (Alpha, 12/15 – at incredible speeds, and solo numbers allocated to massed ladies’ voices) is this fresh reinterpretation by Geoffroy Jourdain and Les Cris de Paris.

Sometimes the tenor parts are transposed up an octave so that they function as high soprano parts; Jourdain cites evidence for this practice in different sources of a *Miserere* by Hasse composed for the women

at the Ospedale degli Incurabili. The *Kyrie* in G minor (RV587) has a sonorous depth and solemnity on account of the bold lower strings and prominent organ, and all-female choral textures are fulsome and theatrical in tone, with the petition ‘Christe eleison’ possessing desperate urgency. The *Credo* in E minor (RV591) sounds overly effortful but the singers lack nothing in textural richness and impact. The unpersuasively manic speed of the trumpet-festooned opening of the *Gloria* typifies a tendency to sacrifice radiance in pursuit of high-octane energy. The high upward transposition of the tenor lines in ‘Et in terra pax’ scintillates the ear, although its effectiveness is diminished by over-active plucking from two theorbos; nevertheless, Jourdain embraces dissonances that most performances shy away from in a way that offers an enthralling illumination of Vivaldi’s skill as a choral composer. Solo numbers are sung by talented members of the choir.

It is a clever idea to use the *Concerto madrigalesco* (RV129) to introduce the *Magnificat* in G minor (RV610a), with which it shares thematic material. Brooding atmospheres in the canticle (‘Suscepit Israel’) are more convincing than turbulent animation (a hard-edged ‘Fecit potentiam’). A selection from various concertos, solo motets and miscellaneous pieces written for the Pietà might have provided a more rounded and rewarding perspective, so the perfect concept album devoted to Vivaldi’s foundlings still waits to be made.

David Vickers

Ave Maria'

Bingham God be in my head. Les Saintes Maries de la mer **Burrell** Magnificat & Nunc dimittis
R Clarke Ave Maria **Leighton** Missa Cornelius,
Op 81 **J Marsh** Evening Canticles, ‘St Paul’s
Service’ **McDowall** Ave Maria **Tavener** Missa
brevis **Wishart** Three Carols

The St Catharine's Girls' Choir, Cambridge / Edward Wickham

Resonus © RES10170 (66' • DDD • T/t)



The Anglican church is responsible for generating a unique repertoire of music for upper voices – music that is celebrated in this first standalone release by The St Catharine’s Girls’ Choir, Cambridge. That it is very much an ongoing tradition is evident from even the briefest glance at the track-listing: five living composers (all of them female, interestingly) sit alongside Rebecca Clarke, John Tavener and

Kenneth Leighton for this attractive collection of contemporary choral works.

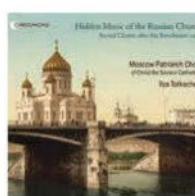
The St Catharine’s Girls’ Choir are the UK’s only college-based girls’ choir and, unlike comparable groups such as the Wells Cathedral Choristers (aged between 14 and 18), take their membership from an age group more equivalent to male choristers. Twenty girls between 8 and 15 sing weekly services under college music director Edward Wickham, and here demonstrate both their skills and their limitations.

The youth of the voices gives the choir a slightly breathy quality – not unpleasant, especially when harnessed to produce the forthright, unfussy performances we hear here. The softly undulating lines and shimmering blend of Cecilia McDowall’s lovely *Ave Maria* show the choir at their best, tugging and releasing their way through a lovely sequence of suspensions. The Renaissance-style writing of Rebecca Clarke’s *Ave Maria* also works well, its contrapuntal lines clearly picked out under Wickham’s direction, as does the follow-my-leader scalic imitation of Judith Bingham’s *God be in my head*, banishing all memories of the Walford Davies setting with its instinctive response to text.

But Leighton’s *Missa Cornelius* needs more grit, more grip in the sound for complete success, especially in the glorious sunburst of contrapuntal lines in the *Sanctus*, and the expansive, arching phrases of the Mass could do with more shape. Tavener’s *Missa brevis*, with its thankless melodic leaps, also exposes some weakness, with top notes occasionally snatched and shrill. **Alexandra Coghlan**

Hidden Music of the Russian Church'

Sacred Chants after the Revolution 1917'
Alexandrov Bless the Lord, O my soul. In thy kingdom remember us, O Lord. We hymn thee. The Lord’s Prayer. Praise the Name of the Lord (two versions). From My Youth **Chesnokov** Cherubic Hymn. It is meet and right to bless you, O Theotokos **Golovanov** Cherubic Hymn. He who closed the abyss **Kastalsky** St Simeon’s Prayer. Let God arise **Nikolsky** O Gladsome Light. We hymn thee
Moscow Patriarchal Choir of Christ the Saviour Cathedral / Ilya Tolkachev
Christophorus © CHR77402 (54' • DDD • T/t)



This is an astounding recording, on account of both the repertoire selected and the quality of the singing. The choir (‘patriarshiy’ should be translated ‘patriarchal’ rather than

‘patriarch’) is that of the vast Cathedral of Christ the Saviour in Moscow, rebuilt in 1998, where the recording was made, and not only do they know exactly how to make the best of the enormous acoustical space, but engineer Alexander Kalashnikov’s recording is outstandingly good.

The title is perhaps somewhat misleading: to read the detailed booklet-notes by Ivan Vishnevskiy, one would receive the impression that Kastalsky is unknown and Alexandrov exceedingly famous, but exactly the opposite situation obtains in general outside Russia. Alexandrov is easily the least-known composer of the five recorded here, and it is fortunate that the disc includes seven of his works, all of the highest quality. They recall Chesnokov in some ways, but that resemblance is technical – there is a similar mastery of the intricacies of choral writing and of counterpoint – but the musical gestures, and most especially his melodic gifts, are entirely different, and beautifully demonstrated in the three of the works that make use of a soloist – *In thy kingdom* (that is, the Beatitudes), *We hymn thee* (‘Tebe’ poem) and a setting of the Lord’s Prayer.

Alexandrov was a pupil of Medtner, and though his name is little-known outside Russia, anyone who has heard the national anthem of the former Soviet Union (now, with new words, that of Russia) will have heard his music. As Vishnevskiy notes, ‘Alexandrov saw no general ideological or musical obstacles standing in the way of his transformation from choirmaster of Christ the Saviour Cathedral (1918–22) to “official” musician of the Soviet Union’, a statement that certainly requires deeper explication than it subsequently receives. Nevertheless, the music recorded here leaves the listener in no doubt as to his gifts, however they were used.

Nikolai Golovanov’s work has begun to appear in concerts and recordings but he is a composer whose time is still to come. The richly textured *He who closed the abyss* is particularly remarkable. Nikolsky, Chesnokov and Kastalsky are represented by two works each. The Nikolsky pieces, expertly scored, are still relative rarities but these days Chesnokov and Kastalsky can hardly be considered ‘hidden’. Nevertheless, the pieces are well chosen indeed; Kastalsky’s *Let God arise* provides a superb conclusion to an anthology that is both unusual and arresting. Performances throughout are of the highest standard and my only reservation would be a slight excess of vibrato in the upper voices from time to time. This is a revelatory disc, by any standards. **Ivan Moody**

LP REISSUES

Peter Quantrill on an eclectic batch of vinyl releases

Nights at the round table

Annoyingly, all it took was a vacuum cleaner. Snagged in the Medusa's locks of my so-called wireless network, the hose brought crashing to the floor a 2TB hard drive, and with it the equivalent of 20 metres of shelf space. Twenty *Rings*, 30 *St Matthew Passions*, 40 Mahler Ninths ... all gone, lost amid the wreckage of 'bad sectors' and overpriced recovery software. Thus did a box of recent LP releases arrive with a succour-bringing thunk of permanence.

Most eye-catching among the covers was Erik Bosgraaf's solo-recorder version of **Vivaldi**'s *The Four Seasons* on Brilliant Classics. The performance is no less vivid: Julie-Anne Sadie noted the 'simply fabulous' rapport between Bosgraaf and his period-instrument, chamber-scaled Ensemble Cordevento when she reviewed the CD (4/14), and the LP satisfactorily fills out the accompanying thrum of Baroque guitar and chitarrone in the slow movements of 'Autumn' and 'Winter' while losing none of the ping in the upper partials of the soloist's recorders.

(In the interests of full disclosure to vinyl-heads, a customs declaration is required: these records were played on a Rega Planar 1 with a Goldring 1042 cartridge, through a Pro-Ject Phono Box SE hooked up, via Chord Company cabling, to a Nait 5i amplifier, with output from a pair of much-loved PMC DB1s. It was a set-up to which my budget stretched 12 years ago and has since given me few pangs of regret.)

The bulk of my collection was built at cut-price during the early 1990s. Drunk on promises of '4D sound' and everlasting silver-plated satisfaction, scores of collectors flooded the London second-hand market with lovingly foxed and

greasily fingered LPs. Sell in haste, repent at leisure. Unless house moves and acid-stained divorces have dumped their record players on a skip, these 'heritage collectors' will be among the music lovers who, the surveys say, are rediscovering LP.

It is surely at them that Berlin Classics has aimed its series of reissues from the East-German Eterna catalogue. A fresh gatefold series design encloses original sleeve-notes in English and German. The LP is housed in an (unlined) inner-sleeve reproduction of the original cover. A separate sheet reproduces the original mastertape notes, like a bespoke version of the green and grey record cards included with old Archiv LPs in their stitched cream gatefolds. There is even (an especially nice touch) a short piece of fresh editorial which looks back on the recording from the artist's perspective – or in the case of Kurt Sanderling, from his widow Barbara, who played double bass in the Berlin Symphony Orchestra for this **Shostakovich** Fifth.

The recordings themselves were either ignored or given a dusty reception in these quarters, perhaps not without reason. The Shostakovich now sounds awfully solemn by the standards of both Sanderling's contemporaries and most of his successors. The effort to elevate the Fifth's symphonic status through a late-Brucknerian weight of utterance results in a grim if intermittently gripping first movement and risks seriously missing the point of the *Carmen* quotations in the *Scherzo*.

An operatic **Mozart** recital does not find Peter Schreier in the most freely flowing voice, further hampered by heavy-set accompaniment from the Staatskapelle Dresden and Otmar Suitner in the incongruously hallowed acoustic of the Lukaskirche. What is stiff and precious

about the German Side A (*Die Entführung, Die Zauberflöte*) is unexpectedly more mellifluous on the Italian Side B, which is rounded off with some Classically moulded divisions in Tito's 'Se all' impero' – and by the dynamic compression and fuzz which often afflicted end-of-side tracks even in the golden age of vinyl.

Still without sung texts, but in a demonstration-class recording, Orff's fairytale opera *Die Kluge* (first reviewed in March 1983) switches between an impressively broad but focused orchestral soundstage and a multichannel-miked studio for the *Singpiel* dialogue. The engineers have as much fun with stereo spatialisation effects as Herbert Kegel clearly does in front of his Leipzig Radio forces. It's just a shame about the music.

However modest, no LP collection was without a **Beethoven** *Moonlight/Pathétique/Appassionata* triptych. The Peter Rösel of 2016 admits to apprehension in 1970 about measuring up to competition on record from the likes of Wilhelm Kempff. An unexaggerated (now unfashionable?) tenderness distinguishes the opening of the *Moonlight*, and I enjoyed his quietly cumulative progress through the central variations and inner voices of the *Appassionata* as much as the sound of the piano itself: uncommonly even across the registers, captured close up yet with a resonant core to the instrument.

The bar is raised, however, by a more mercurial and emphatic *Pathétique* from Sviatoslav Richter. Even in the lo-fi early stereo sound from 1962, Richter's strength of rhetoric and rhythmic drive are in a class of their own; as are the nicely differentiated approaches to a Russian **Brahms** taken by David Oistrakh and Leonid Kogan in the Violin Concerto. Melodiya's own approach to the LP renaissance is more cynical, judging by the formulaic appearance of this trio. Dull grey covers, functional label design and total absence of editorial hardly justify the asking price of £35 (per release!) on the UK market. Anyone hoping to work out Cyrillic titles for old times' sake will be sorely disappointed.

Higher standards prevail from Sony Classical on two of Nikolaus Harnoncourt's final recordings. He found new things to say about **Mozart** and **Beethoven** until the very end. Some ideas that took my breath away on CD have begun to pall on LP: not only the distended conclusion to Beethoven's Fifth, destined for infamy, but the Prussian curtess of the introduction to Mozart's E flat Symphony. Bellowing horns in the first movement of the G minor are no less out of tune, first violins still more desiccated.



On A-B comparisons of CD to LP it's often remarked how LP gives a Romantic effect, lending ripeness and rounding off edges, like Vaseline on a camera lens. Sony's mastering level is sufficiently low to admit a huge dynamic range. Thus trombones make their intended impact (intended by Harnoncourt, that is) in the finale of the Fifth with a scouring power which is the acoustic analogue of the toxic liquid you pour down drains. The surfaces are none too quiet, and would only deteriorate in their unlined paper sleeves (surely a pointless piece of penny-pinching, and Sony isn't alone in this). Had I paid money for this album from a shop (archaic thought) I would be returning the next day to request another copy. Or a different recording.

Perhaps Claudio Abbado took to the grave the secret of why, after five decades of breaking a lance for **Bruckner's** First in its 'Linz' version, he so belatedly changed tack to the elaborated 'Vienna' revision of 1891. His previous recordings had been more content to explore the composer's ties to the past, to Schubert, even more to Beethoven. A year before his death, Abbado conducted an urgent search for paths hitherto untaken, using the 'Vienna' version's bonus drumrolls, countermelodies and harmonic ventures to whip up ahistorically Mahlerian angst, enlivened in even the most stressful tuttis by the 'scrupulous detail' remarked on by Philip Clark (11/13). Accentus presents the LP with no extra material, and the dynamic range is lower than that registered on DG vinyl for Bruckner's Ninth in the

conductor's very last concerts. At the top end of not only retro chic but audiophile nirvana, Linn has produced a 45rpm 'supercut' of **Haydn's** Clock Symphony. As the final panel of a Haydn triptych from the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the CD version was received with qualified enthusiasm by David Threasher (A/15). On LP, it's a sensation. Robin Ticciati's swing through the not-so-slow movement makes delicious sense when every flick and whisper and bounce of the SCO's ever-alert response is caught with an uncanny sense of the mythic 'presence' attached by vinyl lovers to the format. The additional space for mastering depth afforded by the 45rpm format yields an uncompromised dynamic range. The impact of a poky solo bassoon and dry-skinned timpani is as satisfying as the tangible sense of space in the acoustic of the Usher Hall. Essential listening.

As is an album which unfairly passed under the radar of the classical press when it was released two years ago. On '**Wood Works**', the Danish Quartet present their own arrangements of folk tunes from their country and childhood. These jigs and reels are rescued from the studied whimsy which afflict similar, smart-casual albums by the evident affection of their own arrangements, and the infectious enthusiasm of their playing. Charm and pathos are bestowed in equal measure through melodies associated with weddings, sailors, farmers and itinerant fiddlers. When the Quartet toured the album to the City of London Festival after a high-fibre first half of Nielsen and Beethoven, well-

heeled patrons palpably itched to slip off their ties and get dancing. Try out, on a streaming service, the chill mists rising from *Lasse's Waltz* or the homespun pride of *Five Sheep, Four Goats*, loosened up with a funky flugelhorn solo – then listen to the LP for the real thing.

THE RECORDINGS

Vivaldi The Four Seasons

Bosgraaf vn Ensemble Cordevento

Brilliant Classics • 90006

Shostakovich Symphony No 5

Berlin SO / Sanderling

Berlin Classics • 0300749BC

Mozart Arias

Schreier; Staatskapelle Dresden / Suitner

Berlin Classics • 0300753BC

Orff Die Kluge

Leipzig RSO / Kegel

Berlin Classics • 0300747BC

Beethoven Piano Sonatas –

Moonlight, Pathétique, Appassionata

Rösel

Berlin Classics • 0300751BC

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 8, Pathétique.

Eight Bagatelles

Richter

Melodiya mono • MELLP0055

Brahms Violin Concerto

D Oistrakh; Moscow RSO / Kondrashin

Melodiya mono • MELLP0056

Brahms Violin Concerto

Kogan; Boston SO / Monteux

Melodiya mono • MELLP0057

Mozart The Last Symphonies (Nos 39-41)

Concentus Musicus Wien / Harnoncourt

Sony Classical • 88843 026331

Beethoven Symphonies Nos 4 & 5

Concentus Musicus Wien / Harnoncourt

Sony Classical • 88875 136451

Bruckner Symphony No 1

Lucerne Festival Orch / Abbado

Accentus • ACC40274

Haydn Symphony No 101, 'Clock'

SCO / Ticciati

Linn • CKH600

Wood Works

Danish Qt

Dacapo • DACLP001

Opera



Tim Ashley is beguiled by Goldmark's *Königin von Saba*:

'Magische Töne, the best-known number in the score, ends with a breathtaking ascent to its final high pianissimos' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 114**



David Fanning watches the Mariinsky's Left-Hander:

'Costumes, lighting and sets are all a delight, and beautifully complement Shchedrin's ear-tickling orchestration' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 117**

Beethoven



Fidelio

Adrienne Pieczonka sop..... Leonore
Jonas Kaufmann ten..... Florestan
Hans-Peter König bass..... Rocco
Tomasz Konieczny bass-baritone..... Don Pizarro
Olga Bezsmertna sop..... Marzelline
Norbert Ernst ten..... Jaquino
Sebastian Holecek bass-bar..... Don Fernando

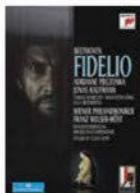
Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra / Franz Welser-Möst

Stage director **Claus Guth**

Video director **Michael Beyer**

Sony Classical (F) **DVD** 88875 19351-9;
(F) **Blu-ray** 88875 19352-9 (136' • NTSC • 16:9 • 60i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Recorded live at the Grosses Festspielhaus, Salzburg, August 7-13, 2015



This *Fidelio* was among the high-profile offerings at the 2015 Salzburg Festival.

Jonas Kaufmann led the cast with the excellent Adrienne Pieczonka as Leonore; one of the most interesting and serious directors of his generation, Claus Guth, was in charge of the production – what could go wrong? Quite a lot, in fact.

The main points in brief: Guth does away with all the dialogue, replacing it with portentous recordings of heavy breathing and nervous mutterings; the same set of vast panelled walls and oversized parquet floor serves for both acts, offering a sort of wonky mouse-eye view of a smart, possibly Viennese apartment; Florestan is imprisoned beneath an ominous black square, which might or might not be exerting itself metaphysically as well as physically over proceedings; Don Pizarro and his minions sport rent-a-baddie dark glasses, overcoats and waxed-back black hair.

The behavioural default is jittery nervousness, with Kaufmann's Florestan lurching about desperately in the final scene before collapsing. To top it all off, Leonore has a 'shadow' who looks on anxiously, adding sign language (I think) interjections which reach an apotheosis as

she strides to the front of the stage in the final minutes to gesticulate furiously – although the camera direction is unsure where really to look at this point.

On one level you have to admire Guth's conviction: he sticks doggedly to his slightly loopy, psychologico-existentialist premise and stages it with his customary skill; the shadow effects that clearly play an important role are, in particular, brilliantly achieved. But none of it seems to have much to do with *Fidelio* – music or drama – and Sony's presentation offers no help: the booklet has just a bare synopsis but no word at all about Guth's far from self-explanatory *Konzept*.

There aren't really many musical compensations, either. Kaufmann performs with his usual professionalism and commitment, and sings intelligently, but the voice doesn't come across as being in the best condition – certainly not a patch on his recording with Abbado (DG, 9/11), or his early Florestan from Zurich, in Jürgen Flimm's workmanlike staging, recently repackaged and made available by ArtHaus on Blu-ray as well as DVD (6/05). Pieczonka is similarly committed, and brings her lovely, gleaming and open-throated soprano to a role that nevertheless does stretch her at its extremes. Hans-Peter König is a decent Rocco, Tomasz Konieczny a woolly, somewhat shouty Don Pizarro.

Franz Welser-Möst's conducting is brusquely efficient, while the Vienna Philharmonic hardly excel themselves (there's some consistently sour oboe playing). And rarely, I suspect, can the insertion of *Leonore* No 3 in Act 2 have felt more unjustified. **Hugo Shirley**

Britten



The Rape of Lucretia

Christine Rice mez Lucretia
Allan Clayton ten Male Chorus
Kate Royal sop Female Chorus
Duncan Rock bar Tarquinius
Matthew Rose bass Collatinus
Michael Sumuel bass-bar Junius
Catherine Wyn-Rogers mez Lucia
Louise Alder sop Bianca
London Philharmonic Orchestra / Leo Hussain

Stage director **Fiona Shaw**

Video director **François Roussillon**

Opus Arte (F) **DVD** OA1219D; (F) **Blu-ray** OABD7206D (114' + 17' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • S/s)

Extra features: 'Post-War Britten: the History of *Lucretia*'; 'Innocence Corrupted: a Conversation with Fiona Shaw'; Cast Gallery

Recorded live at Glyndebourne, August 9, 2015



Fiona Shaw's production of Britten's first chamber opera opened during the Glyndebourne tour in 2013 – the composer's centenary year – and was revived at the main festival two years later, when this DVD was filmed. In the opinion of many, it marked a belated homecoming. The opera was written for and premiered at Glyndebourne in 1946, and the accompanying documentary chronicles the impact of post-war austerity on both the subject and scale of the piece – that it was a chamber opera had as much to do with financial necessity as artistic choice – and outlines the consequences of the subsequent UK tour that led to an eventual rift between Britten and John Christie.

The aftermath of the Second World War to some extent forms Shaw's starting point. She dispenses with the idea that the Male and Female Choruses (Allan Clayton and Kate Royal) should be detached from the action and reimagines them as a pair of archeologists, themselves traumatised by war, who piece the opera's narrative together from what they unearth during a dig, and whose relationship and beliefs are challenged by what they find. The concept allows Shaw to probe both the work's unstable mix of pagan brutality and Christian moralising, and its sometimes troubling sexual politics.

Clayton develops an initial fascination with Tarquinius's insistent sexuality, gleefully carrying him piggyback to Rome during the first-act interlude, before turning away in revulsion as the danger to Christine Rice's Lucretia becomes increasingly clear.



Shadow play: Jonas Kaufmann and Adrienne Pieczonka star in Claus Guth's *Fidelio* at last year's Salzburg Festival

Royal, in a crisis of faith, soon abandons the Bible we find her clutching at the start and later proffers Lucretia the crucifix she wears round her neck in the unavailing hope of providing some comfort. In a scene which Shaw appears to have toned down between 2013 and 2015, the couple copulate, consensually but desperately, in the immediate aftermath of the rape.

Shaw is careful in her handling of the relationship between Lucretia and Duncan Rock's Tarquinius. Rice's smile when he arrives at her house suggests she both appreciates his looks and is flattered by his attentions. But she also establishes the sexual contentment Lucretia feels in her marriage to Collatinus (Matthew Rose), and we fully understand how Tarquinius's actions so irrevocably tear her world apart. In her depiction of the marriage itself, however, Shaw departs from Britten. She gives the couple a daughter, who is frightened by noise during the rape, and in front of whom Lucretia later kills herself – a tacit evocation of the discussions of the ethics and consequences of suicide integral to the versions of Lucretia's story by Livy, Augustine and Shakespeare. Rose, meanwhile, plays down Collatinus's proprietorial attitude towards his wife's fidelity. His statement that Lucretia should

be 'forgiven for what she has given' is sung with deep affection, though it more accurately suggests a catastrophic failure of understanding on his part that directly precipitates her suicide.

It's beautifully acted and sung. Rice wrings your heart throughout and her self-lacerating final scenes have a harrowing immediacy. Clayton and Royal are engrossing as their relationship buckles under strain before winning through to newly found mutual understanding: both are in fine voice; Royal, sometimes castigated for slipshod diction, has no difficulty projecting the text here. Rock, lethally handsome, superbly captures the violence beneath Tarquinius's surface charm. Lyrical yet incisive in his approach, conductor Leo Hussain gets finely detailed playing from his LPO instrumentalists, with every flicker of colour speaking volumes. François Roussillon films it in remorseless close-up, which adds to the emotional nakedness of it all, though we could, on occasion, do with wider stage pictures. There's enough detail in his camerawork, though, to allow us to see the way the archeological apparatus of ropes and plans at ground level gradually assumes a cruciform pattern as the piece progresses – something that I, for one, hadn't noticed in the theatre.

Tim Ashley

Debussy



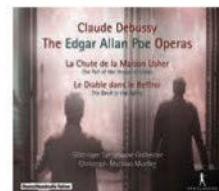
'The Edgar Allan Poe Operas'

La chute de la maison Usher

William Dazeley bar Roderick Usher
Eugene Villanueva bar Roderick's Friend
Virgil Hartinger ten Doctor
Lin Lin Fan sop Lady Madeline

Le diable dans le beffroi^a

Eugene Villanueva bar Burgomaster
Lin Lin Fan sop Jeannette
Michael Dries bass Bellringer
Virgil Hartinger ten Jean
^aSt Jacobi Göttingen Chamber Choir / Göttingen Symphony Orchestra / Christoph Mathias Mueller
Pan Classics F ② PC10342 (89' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Göttingen Stadthalle,
December 10 & 11, 2013



Claude Debussy
The Edgar Allan Poe Operas

La chute de la Maison Usher
Le feu de la forêt

Le diable dans le beffroi
Le Bal des Femmes

Direction : Michael Müller
Chorégraphie : Michael Müller

Scénographie : Michael Müller

Costumes : Michael Müller

Lighting : Michael Müller

Production : Michael Müller

Musique : Claude Debussy

Interprétation : William Dazeley, Eugene Villanueva, Virgil Hartinger, Lin Lin Fan

Ensemble : St Jacobi Göttingen Chamber Choir, Göttingen Symphony Orchestra

Dirigeant : Christoph Mathias Mueller

Ensemble : St Jacobi Göttingen Chamber Choir, Göttingen Symphony Orchestra

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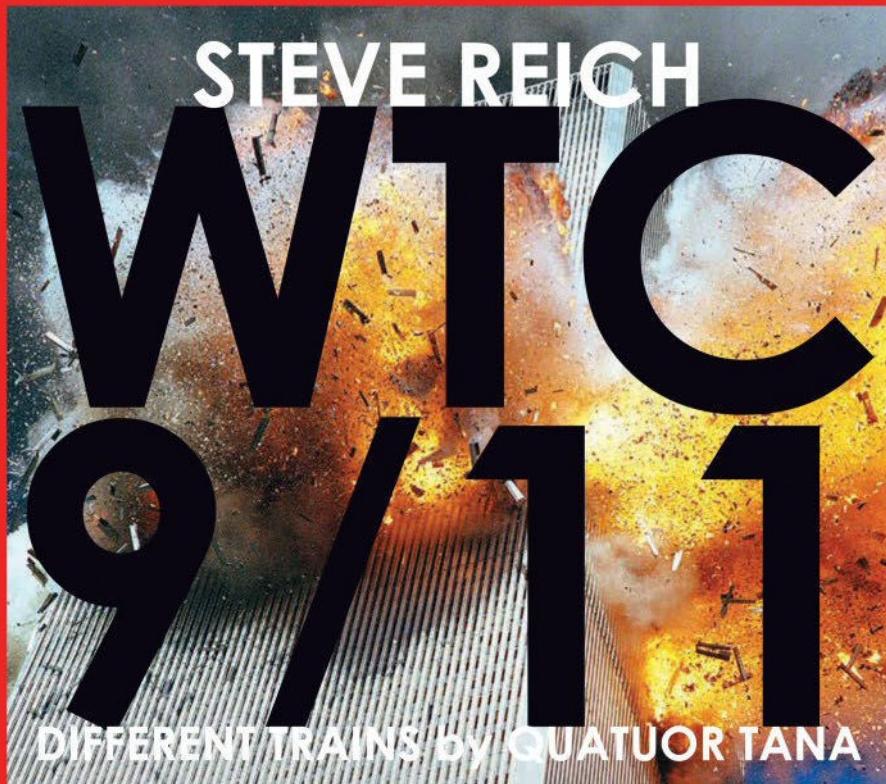
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Ensemble : St Jacobi

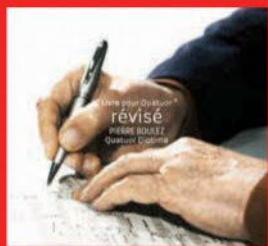
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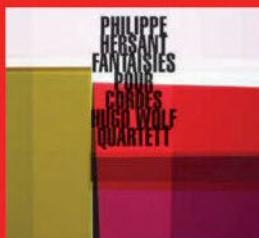
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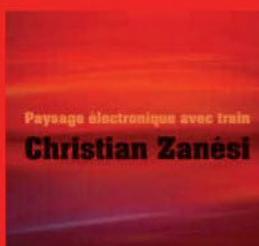
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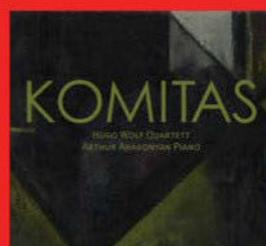
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it in 1912, leaving only a scenario and a few pages of sketches. By then he was also struggling with *La chute de la maison Usher*, the libretto of which gave him endless trouble. This time, however, he progressed further with the music, leaving roughly half the opera in short score at his death.

There have been several reconstructions of *Usher* since. Versions by Carolyn Abbate and Juan Allende-Blin appeared in 1977; the latter, replacing the unset sections of text with dialogue, was recorded by EMI in 1984. The work only edged itself into the repertory, however, in 2006, when Robert Orledge's completion was premiered in Bregenz. Orledge's version of *Le diable dans le beffroi*, meanwhile, based on Debussy's scenario and sketches but substantially his own composition, was given in Montreal in 2012 and the two operas were first performed together in Göttingen in 2013, where these recordings were made.

A satire on Puritan rigidity, Poe's *The Devil in the Belfry* is set in the imaginary Dutch village of Vondervotteimittiss, where the inhabitants, obsessed by setting their watches and clocks to the chimes of the local church, are thrown into confusion when the Devil materialises in its belfry and makes midday strike 13. Debussy, however, was no satirist. The opera replaces Poe's invective with whimsy, and the main narrative, dealing with the Devil's impact on the affair between the Burgomaster's daughter Jeannette and the Bellringer's son Jean, was his own invention. His original plan was that the work should be chorus-driven. Orledge doesn't quite follow this through, though he adheres to Debussy's intentions that the Devil should be a violin virtuoso and that the score for this 'gigue fantastique' should be linked to that of *Images*. There are set-piece dances – polka, valse and tarantella. The Devil is seemingly German, enticing the villagers with snippets of Beethoven and Brahms. It's a work of considerable charm.

With *Usher*, Debussy was on surer ground. Poe's decrepit mansion and its introverted, neurasthenic inhabitants lurk, via Maeterlinck, behind *Pelleás*'s Allemonde, while the vocal writing marks out Roderick Usher, incestuously fixated on his sister Madeline, as a second Golaud. As with *Diable*, however, there are changes to the original tale: Poe's shadowy Doctor is also now obsessed with Madeline and it is he, rather than Roderick, who pronounces her dead before entombing her alive in the family vault. Orledge's completion is unquestionably superb. Where Allende-Blin carefully replicated the sound world of *Pelléas*, Orledge steers us into febrile territory closer to that of *Jeux* and *Le martyre de Saint Sébastien*. Your flesh crawls

at the outset as oboe and trumpet meander under squeaky violin harmonics, and the tension never relaxes for a second during the work's 50 minute span.

Performances and recording, however, have their occasional drawbacks. *Usher* is helped immeasurably by William Dazely's blazing Roderick but elsewhere there are some variable doublings. Debussy gives Madeline little to do and Lin Lin Fan only comes into her own as Jeannette in *Diable*. Eugene Villanueva stands out both as Roderick's rationalistic if bewildered Friend and as the unflappable village Burgomaster, though Virgil Hartinger, *Usher*'s creepy Doctor, is hopelessly overparted as Jean. You can't fault Christoph-Matthias Mueller's conducting and the Göttingen Orchestra's playing is first-rate. *Le diable dans le beffroi* gets the better-balanced recording. *La chute de la maison Usher* seems hampered by the concert format, with Lin Fan placed too close at the start to suggest Madeline's voice drifting through the house's corridors and too far back at the close when her screams signal her horrific final emergence from the Usher tomb. **Tim Ashley**

Fibich

The Bride of Messina

Lucia Cervoni <i>mez</i>	Donna Isabella
Thomas Florio <i>bar</i>	Don Manuel
Richard Samek <i>ten</i>	Don César
Noa Danon <i>sop</i>	Beatrice
Johannes Stermann <i>bass</i>	Diégo
Martin-Jan Nijhof <i>bar</i>	Kajetán
Manfred Wulfert <i>ten</i>	Bohemund
Hale Soner <i>sop</i>	Page
Opera Chorus of the Magdeburg Theatre;	
Magdeburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Kimbo Ishii	
CPO Ⓜ ② CPO777 981-2 (119' • DDD • T/t)	
Recorded live, March 11, 12 & 14, 2015	



'Cursed be your secretiveness, which is to blame for everything that has happened!' Don César rails against his mother in Zdeněk Fibich's opera *The Bride of Messina*. As pertinent as that may be, it would rather spoil the rather bloody plot in this opera based on Schiller's 1803 tragedy if she had spilled the beans a little earlier.

Donna Isabella, mourning the death of her husband, the King of Messina, attempts to reconcile her two feuding sons. Each plans to bring his future bride to the castle for his mother's approval, while Isabella reveals that they have a long lost sister, who has been securely hidden in a convent because the King had once had a dream that she would cause the deaths of her two brothers. No

prizes for guessing that their sister Beatrice turns out to be the woman César is secretly in love with, but has been abducted from the convent by Manuel as his own bride-to-be. César slays his brother, then, when the truth is revealed, kills himself.

Fibich's operas haven't enjoyed the success of those by his compatriots Smetana and Dvořák, partly because they share few Czech references – there are few of the Bohemian folk melodies or dance rhythms which course through operas such as *The Bartered Bride* or *Rusalka*. He had an international outlook, also taking inspiration from Shakespeare and Byron. Fibich's early operas were written in German and he was sometimes nicknamed 'the Czech Wagner'. *The Bride of Messina*, composed in 1882-83, is through-composed and assigns leitmotifs to characters. Critics dismissed it as either too German, too Wagnerian or too gloomy and it lasted just seven performances. There is a recording on Supraphon but the Magdeburg performance here was the first to take place outside the Czech Republic.

For a small German house, the casting is very decent. As Isabella, mezzo Lucia Cervani is good, with a solid upper register. Noa Danon's Beatrice is strained at times and not always ideally steady – no match for the glorious Gabriela Běnáčková on Supraphon. The brothers are well cast. Richard Samek has a nice ring to his tenor and stays the course well to the bitter end, while Thomas Florio's gritty baritone makes much of the character of Manuel. Fibich writes few ensembles, but the chorus is given plenty to do and the Magdeburg Theatre Opera Chorus acquires itself well. Kimbo Ishii brings a fine sweep to Fibich's score, coming in around 15 minutes faster than František Jílek, although he makes a minor cut to the noble, brassy funeral march.

The live recording doesn't suffer from too much stage noise and the booklet contains a full libretto and translation, albeit in minuscule print. **Mark Pullinger**
Comparative version:

Jílek (SUPR) 11 1492-2 612

Goldmark

Die Königin von Saba

Katerina Hebelková <i>mez</i>	Queen of Sheba
Nuttaporn Tammathi <i>ten</i>	Assad
Irma Mihelič <i>sop</i>	Sulamith
Károly Szemerédy <i>bass-bar</i>	King Solomon
Kim-Lillian Strebel <i>sop</i>	Astaroth
Jin Seok Lee <i>bass</i>	High Priest
Kevin Moreno <i>bar</i>	Baal-Haanan
Andrei Yvan <i>bass</i>	Temple Guard
Chorus and Extra Chorus of the Freiburg Theatre;	
Vocal Ensemble of the Freiburg Musikhochschule;	
Freiburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Fabrice Bollon	
CPO Ⓜ ③ CPO555 013-2 (3h 8' • DDD • T/t)	



Die Königin von Saba was the work that put its Hungarian-Jewish composer on the operatic map at its first performance in Vienna in 1875. It was hugely popular on both sides of the Atlantic in its day, though in Britain, the Lord Chamberlain's prohibition against the theatrical representation of Biblical subjects prevented its being heard in London until 1910. Strauss and Mahler were among its many conductors. Caruso was one of several star tenors to play Assad, whose uncontrollable desire for the Queen of Sheba destroys his relationship with his intended bride Sulamith. Lilli Lehmann included both principal female roles in her considerable repertory. Its popularity waned after the First World War, though it was revived annually in Vienna until 1938, when the Nazis banned it.

Goldmark is usually dismissed as eclectic, though his work can also be viewed as adopting a cosmopolitan stance at a time of growing nationalism. Just as he saw no inherent dichotomy between Brahms (a friend) and Wagner (he liked the music but not the man or his opinions), so he perceived no disjunction between elements of Wagnerian methodology and post-Meyerbeerian grand opera. With its four-act/five-scene structure, ballets, grand ceremonials and complex theatrical demands (Assad dies in a sandstorm), *Die Königin von Saba* is in many ways a fine example of the latter. Goldmark deploys closed forms – the set-piece arias can be analysed in terms of recitative, cavatina and cabaletta – and avoids anything approximating the symphonic development of thematic material. The Wagnerisms lie elsewhere.

The narrative is frequently cited as derived from *Tannhäuser*, though there are shifts in emphasis. Assad is a warrior and diplomat, rather than an artist. There's none of Wagner's pseudo-Christian emphasis on chastity: the texts of Sulamith's arias derive from the Song of Songs and her feelings for Assad are explicitly sexual. Wagner's influence on vocal writing and harmony is, however, significant. The big choruses unfurl with majestic slowness like the ceremonies from *Lohengrin*, while the Queen, when crossed, resorts to Ortrud-like phrases over an immense span. *Tristan*-esque chromatics turn Orientalist in their depiction of the Queen and her retinue, while Assad's hallucinations in the Syrian desert steer close to *Tristan*'s ravings in Wagner's Act 3. The shockingly brief love duet, however, is the

antithesis of *Tristan* – a furtive quickie rather than a night of rapture – though there's a terrifically sexy passage towards the end, when the Queen, sensing Assad is deserting her, uses all her wiles to get him back.

The new recording hails from Freiburg and the same team that gave us CPO's much-admired *Francesca da Rimini* earlier this year (1/16). The two sets share the same conductor in Fabrice Bollon, and hence a number of similarities in approach: subtlety in music that can turn bombastic if insensitively handled; orchestral refinement and a refusal to indulge in melodrama or crude effects; and singing of great authority from a uniformly fine, if unfamiliar cast, who more than adequately meet the score's challenges.

We could do with more words from Katerina Hebelková's Queen, but her voice, with its quick vibrato and dark, almost Rita Gorr-ish tone, is deeply sensual, and we fully understand why her Assad, Thai tenor Nuttaporn Tammathi, is so fatally attracted. He's a real find, singing with eloquence, passion and a voice of remarkable beauty and evenness: his 'Magische Töne', the best-known number in the score, ends with a breathtaking ascent to its final high *pianissimos*. Irma Mihelič's silvery-toned Sulamith is touchingly vulnerable, though this is a voice that can also soar with thrilling ease over massive choral forces. Hungaroton's 1980 recording with Siegfried Jerusalem as Assad and Klára Takács as the Queen seems staid and unnecessarily grandiose in comparison. It's a heady, enthralling experience, and I can't recommend it highly enough. **Tim Ashley**

Comparative version:

A Fischer (2/81st, 6/86) (HUNG) HCD12179/81

Mozart

Le nozze di Figaro



Adam Plachetka bass-bar Figaro

Martina Janková sop Susanna

Luca Pisaroni bass-bar Count Almaviva

Anett Fritsch sop Countess Almaviva

Margarita Gritskova mez Cherubino

Ann Murray mez Marcellina

Carlos Chausson bass-bar Bartolo

Paul Schweinester ten Don Basilio

Franz Supper ten Don Curzio

Erik Anstine bass Antonio

Christina Gansch sop Barbarina

Vienna State Opera Chorus; Vienna Philharmonic

Orchestra / Dan Ettinger

Stage director Sven-Eric Bechtolf

Video director Tiziano Mancini

EuroArts (E) 207 2958 (3h 10' • NTSC • 16:9 •

1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.0 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Recorded live at the Salzburg Festival, August 2015

Includes Digital Opera Guide



Sven-Eric Bechtolf, the drama director of the Salzburg Festival, has been tackling the Mozart/da Ponte comedies in reverse order. *Figaro* was staged last year, and it's being revived this year with only one change of cast. The recording benefits from optional little panels superimposed for a few seconds on the action: part synopsis, part (slightly arch) commentary, part quotes from the director. You can't combine these with the subtitles: no loss, as the latter are approximate when not downright inaccurate, and full of errors ('wets' his appetite, 'who's' voice is that, 'slender' for slander, 'imprudence' for impudence, and that's only Act 1).

The action takes place just after the First World War, in which Figaro has evidently served, perhaps as the Count's batman. Alex Eales's split-level set is ideal for showing the bustle of the Almaviva household. Sometimes this is a distraction, thanks to the selective eye of the camera: we surely don't want to be watching the servants having their lunch during the Count's aria, nor should we be focusing on Figaro at the aria's climax. More often, though, the simultaneous activity illuminates the tensions and obsessions. During Bartolo's 'La vendetta!' Marcellina goes snooping round Susanna's room, and she is followed in turn by Basilio and the Count. While Figaro is expounding the advantages of the marital bedroom's position, the Count and the Countess enter their respective rooms. The Count is evidently a vain man, checking in the mirror for, perhaps, grey hairs or a bald patch. In fact the portrayal of the Count is fascinating. Bechtolf makes the point that times are changing and Almaviva is aware that he can't claim the privileges of his forefathers. On the other hand, the *droit de seigneur* was (one might assume) not much of an issue in the 1920s. The Countess is flirtatious with Cherubino: how telling that she hides the copy of 'Voi che sapete'. But she comes across as a sad figure, retreating to the basement at the end of Act 3 and wistfully getting out her wedding dress.

The characterisation in general is as expected, with one exception. Da Ponte's Basilio is an intriguer, malicious and ironic: portraying him as being in love with Cherubino, upset when the Count discovers the page alone with Susanna, runs counter to both text and music. When Cherubino is banished, Basilio is on



'For sheer watchability, this production has a lot going for it': Sven-Eric Bechtolf's 2015 Salzburg production of *Le nozze di Figaro*

his knees in despair. But it's not serious enough to spoil the whole. Luca Pisaroni, who plays Leporello and Guglielmo in the companion productions, is cast not as Figaro but as his master: young, charismatic, funny when exasperated. Having fooled around with Cherubino in Act 2 – how sensuously she puts on her stockings! – Anett Fritsch goes on to sing a beautiful, anguished 'Dove sono'. Adam Plachetka and Martina Janková are a lively, resourceful servant couple, and Margarita Gritskova is a convincingly troublesome Cherubino. The secondary characters are all finely drawn; the arias for Marcellina and Basilio are omitted. Apart from an eccentric slowing-up in the Act 1 trio, Dan Ettinger's conducting is well paced. For sheer watchability, this production has a lot going for it.

Richard Lawrence

Rossini

Il barbiere di Siviglia – Contro un cor; Temporale; Una voce poco fa. **La Cenerentola** – Nacqui all'affanno; Temporale. **La donna del lago** – Tanti affetti in tal momento. **Otello** – Assisa a piè d'un salice; Deh calma, o ciel. **Semiramide** – Bel raggio lusinghier. L'âme délaissée. Canzonetta spagnuola. Giovanna d'Arco. Nizza
Karine Deshayes *mez*
Les Forces Majeures / Raphaël Merlin
Aparté (F) AP121 (73' • DDD • T/t)



Few 19th-century composers wrote for mezzo-sopranos quite as brilliantly as Rossini and few mezzo-sopranos can resist embracing Rossini's vocal pyrotechnics at some point in their careers. It was Cecilia Bartoli's two Rossini albums (Decca, 9/89, 2/92), along with her recording of *Il barbiere di Siviglia*, which launched her into classical music's stratosphere – and hers are still benchmark recital discs. Karine Deshayes has been steadily establishing herself as a polished mezzo in her native France. Along with recent debuts in New York and San Francisco, this delightful disc dedicated to Rossini deserves to bring her to wider attention.

This isn't just a crash-bang-wallop display of vocal bravura. Deshayes and conductor Raphaël Merlin have put together an intelligent recital showcasing Rossini's melodic gift as well as show-stopping acrobatics. Woven into the programme of arias are a few songs and the dramatic cantata *Giovanna d'Arco* in the orchestration undertaken by Salvatore Sciarrino for Rossini's bicentenary. A couple of orchestral storms – a Rossini speciality – appear as prefaces to arias from their respective operas.

Deshayes has a lighter mezzo than Bartoli's chocolate tone, without the Italian's machine-gun coloratura, although she negotiates these passages with aplomb, especially in the rondo finale from *La Cenerentola*. In terms of vocal weight, she is more akin to Joyce DiDonato ('Colbran, the Muse', Erato, 12/09). If Deshayes doesn't yet share the American's technical brilliance, she has far more colour at the top of her range than DiDonato's blanched tone. Chest notes can have a slightly hollow quality but never descend into muddy molasses.

She plays an affecting Desdemona, a feisty Rosina and a fiery Semiramide. Her 'Bel raggio lusinghier' is sans chorus (unlike Bartoli and DiDonato) but is extremely well sung, and only aspirated coloratura may trouble some listeners. *Giovanna d'Arco* forms the disc's dramatic centrepiece. Deshayes's gorgeous tone is injected with plenty of drama and a thrilling top, making a great showcase for this lesser-known gem. A delicious *Canzonetta spagnuola* brings proceedings to a coy end.

Deshayes is supported by the lively Les Forces Majeures – sinewy, robust playing that is a joy, especially the rattling timps in a fabulous *Cenerentola* tempest. With texts and translations included, this is certainly a disc dedicated Rossinians should investigate. **Mark Pullinger**

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The Mariinsky's production of Shchedrin's *The Left-Hander* is now available in a DVD and Blu-ray double-pack

Shchedrin

The Left-Hander

Andrei Popov ten The Left-Hander

Edward Tsanga bass-bar Ataman Platov

Vladimir Moroz bar Alexander I/Nicholas I

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Maria Maksakova mez Princess Charlotte

Andrei Spekhov bar English Under-Skipper

Mariinsky Chorus and Orchestra / Valery Gergiev

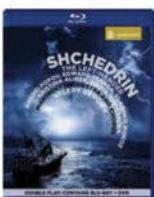
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Recorded live, July 27 & 28, 2013



This is the opera that gained notoriety at its UK concert premiere at London's Barbican, when Gergiev turned up an hour late without explanation. Parts of the audience had already given up, and others did so after Act 1. They might not have done in such numbers had they been seeing the staged version, filmed here from the Mariinsky Theatre in July 2013. Costumes, lighting and sets are all a delight to behold, and they beautifully complement Shchedrin's ear-tickling orchestration (which the London critics praised, whatever their other reservations). The appearance of



glamorous female chorus-members in cut-away Grenadier Guards outfits should have been enough on its own to keep most of the audience in their seats.

To explain: on a visit to England, Tsar Alexander I is enchanted by the workmanship in a miniature clockwork steel flea presented to him as a gift. His successor Nicholas I commissions a Russian artisan (the Left-Hander) to show that Russians can outdo such feats, which the artisan does by fixing microscopic signed horseshoes to the flea. The Left-Hander is sent to England to study the country's technical accomplishments but on his return his advice is ignored, and he is mistreated and left to die.

This tale, richer in allegory concerning Russian identity than any short summary can convey, is a gift to a composer such as Shchedrin with a lifelong interest in both affirming and critiquing his native culture, and whose musical idiom has been honed over decades to those ends. Because his musical characterisation evokes both of Shostakovich's operas (the grotesquerie of *The Nose* and the tragic-satirical mix of *The Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk*), not to mention the mechanical vs human dichotomy of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* and Stravinsky's *The Nightingale*, it risks invidious comparisons, from which it emerges with credit, but not entirely

unscathed, since Shchedrin's invention flags over some quite lengthy periods.

The Left-Hander certainly remains a must-know piece for anyone interested in 21st-century Russian opera. Given the quality of performances in this handsome production (tenor Andrei Popov in the title-role and coloratura soprano Kristina Alieva as the Flea are outstanding), there would seem to be every reason for the specialist collector to invest.

There are drawbacks, however. As is standard for this label, the booklet fawns over the achievements of Shchedrin and Gergiev while being short on information about the work itself or its adaptation. Unlike the CD equivalent (6/15), there is no libretto or translation – not even a synopsis. Of course there are subtitles. But anyone not already acquainted with Leskov's folk-tale may find it hard to make sense of the proceedings. Nor will they be able to evaluate Shchedrin's adaptations, in particular his grafting-on of a sentimental-religious ending as a substitute for Leskov's allegory of the replacement of artisans by machines; this (assuming it is not itself meant ironically) may be as disturbing to some listeners as it is appealing to others. Given the expense evidently lavished on the production itself, it is deplorable that the purchaser of the Blu-ray/DVD should be left so short-changed. **David Fanning**

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

The Végh Quartet in its early prime

A treasure-trove of vintage chamber music recordings from a string quartet at its youthful best

Having granted us the opportunity to hear vintage recordings by the Viennese clarinettist Leopold Vlach (see last month's *Replay*) and with a set devoted to the significant Barylli Quartet waiting in the wings, the Scribendum label is certainly doing us chamber music lovers proud. Its 14-CD set **The Art of Végh Quartet** (the ensemble founded in 1940, disbanded in 1980) is another case in point even though the majority of the recordings included, which date from the early 1950s, have already been released on other labels. As I pointed out in a previous *Replay* it was interesting to remind myself just how many distinguished vintage Beethoven string quartet cycles were recorded in France, not least both Hungarian Quartet sets (EMI/Warner) and the 1952 Haydn Society recordings by the Véghs (also out on Music & Arts) which are featured here. Listening through to the whole cycle found me admiring the weighty deliberation of the Op 18 series, the strength and occasional gruff humour of the 'middle' quartets (Op 59 No 1 is among the finest versions on disc), the pointed aggression of the *Harp*'s scherzo where the signal 'four-note' motif is stressed for all its worth, and the cerebral mastery of the late quartets. The *Grosse Fuge* – not programmed as the finale of Op 130, incidentally – is especially impressive in its bold, gritty delivery while Op 127 combines warmth and, in the scherzo, full-on humour. Maybe Op 131 lacks the breathtaking intensity that the Busch brought to it (especially in the 1930s on EMI/Warner) but the Véghs' pondered readings are well worth revisiting. And while the Quartet's later (stereo) Astrée set

provides a more loose-limbed, 'open'-sounding option, this early set consistently holds one's attention.

The six Bartók quartets (also out on Music & Arts) were long considered benchmarks until the Véghs remade them in stereo (again for Astrée), by which time the Quartet's intonation was occasionally tending towards waywardness. But the musical payoff of a more spontaneous-sounding manner more than compensated. The best of the early set can be heard in the Third and Sixth Quartets, the latter bringing late

This is the 'early' Véghs' way: always thoughtful and following the music's lead

Bartók into line with late Beethoven, the emotive first movement filled with pathos, its closing moments sublimely beautiful, and the middle two alternating a chilling sense of desolation with a touch of mock-vaudville. The three Brahms quartets come off rather well, the Third especially (tellingly stressed accents at the beginning and some effectively gauged *portamentos*), although I have to admit I missed the Busch's heart-rendering candour at the close of the First Quartet's 'Romanza'.

Schubert's *Rosamunde* Quartet features a tense, doleful Menuetto and a gaily tripping finale, though the sound is rather edgy; a shortcoming that occasionally intrudes elsewhere (if not quite so rudely), as does the odd sign of tape deterioration. The Mozart quartets included (K387, 421, 458, 464, 575 and

590), most of which are performed with classical restraint, also sound somewhat worse for wear. Smetana's First Quartet – interestingly coupled with Kodály's Second – doesn't really spring fully to life until we reach the finale, the first two movements rather lacking in drama though the actual playing is rarely short on expressive variety.

This is the 'early' Véghs' way: always thoughtful, always following the music's lead rather than visiting it with this or that manner of personally fashioned affection. Not for this quartet the Juilliard's pristine delivery, the Budapest's ripeness of tone, the *gemütlich* approach of the Amadeus or the Busch's rigour, but something altogether more local in style, more truly Slavic. I enjoyed it enormously, even though the overall impression tends to be more sombre than uplifting, a trend that reversed in later years. One additional problem is an overall lack of repeats, and some collectors might miss the presence of booklet-notes – though, as I've said before, in a case like this, most of what you need to know is available somewhere online. But don't allow just a few carping reservations to put you off: casting the odd gripe aside, this is real musicianship which deserves the privilege of easy availability, especially at such a modest price point.

THE RECORDING



The Art of Végh Quartet
Bartók, Beethoven, Brahms,
Mozart, Schubert et al
Scribendum 14 ฿ SC803



The Végh Quartet, captured in recordings from the 1950s, display the ensemble's fine musicianship

Three-dimensional Elgar

Imagine yourself walking the streets of London with a kindly old relative, a much-loved aunt perhaps, who is fondly reminiscing about how the city looked and felt 75-or-so years ago. Then suddenly, as if by magic, you're catapulted into the world she's describing, with every Cockney voice, trundling vehicle and shouting tradesman coming newly alive. Well, that is exactly how it seems at the close of Edward Elgar's 1933 recording of *Cockaigne* with the BBC Symphony Orchestra, where fine (if constricted) mono switches to wide-screen stereo. Yes, Naxos has already given us Mark Obert-Thorn's excellent transfer of this last of three 78 rpm sides in 'stereo' (synchronised from two pressings where separate microphone/cutter arrangements were used) as a bonus track, but Lani Spahr had the ingenious idea of effecting the magical 'across-the-ages' transition. And there's more – much more.

The first disc ends with the only recording Elgar ever made of music that was neither his own composition nor his own arrangement, the hymn 'O God our help in ages past' (with music by William Croft and words by Isaac Watts), the venue London's Queen Hall, one of three recordings included from that same 1928 session with the London Symphony Orchestra and Philharmonic Choir, and the only one in 'accidental' stereo – surely the happiest audio accident in history. You can take my word for it that the sound is fully up to the standard of mid-late '50s stereo at its most immediate – hugely sonorous and with great depth, powerful brass and a thundering organ at the rear of

the choir. So is this what the Queen's Hall actually sounded like? Apparently so. Elgar's solid conducting – in big, bold sentences – also makes a strong impact. It sounds as authentically Elgarian as anything else in the set.

That's just for starters but the heart of this indispensable collection focuses on Elgar's completed concertos. To deal with the Violin Concerto first, there are four previously unreleased mono test pressings/ alternate takes from the legendary Yehudi Menuhin recording of 1932, including one that includes the first movement's second subject where the 16-year-old Menuhin's playing is, if anything, even more poised and lovely than on the finished recording. Sections of the following two movements witness other minor differences, though they're not quite so marked. The alternative takes of the Cello Concerto with Beatrice Harrison, most of them in 'stereo', are nothing short of revelatory. Not only is the sound a good deal more palatable than on the issued records (and subsequent LP/CD transfers) but the performance segments as presented are both poignant and potently expressive. Nuances, dynamics and phrasing vary from take to take, the most exceptional case being on Disc 2, track 3, where at 6'16" you actually hear Elgar singing along: not, you'll note, in the blithely melodic slow movement but at the Concerto's tragic heart, the finale. How revealing is that? We're also given a complete 'stereo' version of the issued recording and the (skilfully) abridged acoustic recording from 1919/20.

As for what else is included, there's the First Symphony (1930, LSO, in mono),

a mixture of issued sides and unissued test pressings, some of it a little tousled by the finest standards of the day – but, in a sense, the extra ruggedness underlines the impulsive aspect of Elgar's conducting. There are more 'stereo' remixes, including half of the Prelude to *The Kingdom* (again tacked on to the mono 'first' half) and various shorter pieces, and in mono, alternative sides from the Second Symphony, *Enigma Variations*, the *Caractacus* 'Triumphal March' and 'Woodland Interlude' (the Abbey Road London Symphony Orchestra recording under Lawrence Collingwood that was relayed by Telephone Office lines to Elgar in South Band Nursing Home, Worcester), excerpts from the *Wand of Youth* Suites and pieces such as *Rosemary* and *Sérénade lyrique*. These and other pieces like them, whether mono or 'accidental' stereo, fall happily on the ear. It's also good to have access to the version of the Cello Concerto's Adagio that Beatrice Harrison made with HRH Princess Victoria at the piano (Victoria, by the way, the fourth child and second daughter of King Edward VII and Queen Alexandra).

So, a thousand thanks to Somm and to remastering engineer Lani Spahr who has already given us Elgar's acoustic legacy (Music & Arts) and to whom all lovers of this country's undisputed musical king are now indebted – or at least that's how I see it. Chapter and verse on the technical processes used and the history of the project are provided in the exhaustive booklet, as are details of matrices, recording dates, etc. There are historic releases that make the grade because they are just that – 'historic' – and there are releases that make history because they are musically overwhelming. This set is both.

THE RECORDING



Elgar Remastered
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Sir Edward Elgar
Somm ④ SOMMCD261/4

The art of Max Lichtegg

I was delighted to encounter from Archipel/Andromeda a four-CD celebration of the Swiss-Jewish tenor **Max Lichtegg** (1910–92) whose post-war 78s for Decca are prized by the few present-day voice aficionados who know about them, but who has, up to now and as far as I know, received only a single (excellent) local silver-disc reissue, and that from Dutton. Lichtegg's style is immediately engaging, his voice at times animated in the manner

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Otto Klemperer conducts the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in an exceptional live concert

of Peter Anders, while on other occasions more approximating the bold heroics of Wolfgang Windgassen: a featured 1947 Los Angeles broadcast recording of *Die Walküre* Act 1 scene 3, with Rose Bampton as Sieglinde and Alfred Wallenstein conducting, confirms the latter conclusion. Duets with Erna Sack, Lisa Della Casa, Janine Micheau, Dagmar Koller, Lela Bukovic and others are good to have, and there are tracks conducted by Franz Lehár and Otto Ackermann. We're offered Schubert songs sensitively accompanied by Georg Solti, as well as Schubert orchestrated by Felix Weingartner and Max Reger. What most impresses me is how Lichtegg retained the youthfulness of his voice well into maturity: OK, a Schubert sequence from 1980 with his son Theodor Lichtmann at the piano finds him 'belting it out' (as they say), but elsewhere you'd be hard-pressed to distinguish between recordings made in the 1940s and those from the 1970s. Perhaps the most affecting selection occupies the last CD, 'Religiosa/Judaica', with Verdi's 'Ingemisco', Niedermeyer's 'Pietà, Signore' and various Jewish songs, including a Yiddish sequence set down in 1973, again with Theodor at the piano. The folk song 'Di maschke' was recorded in Zürich in 1943 just a little less than a year after another fine Jewish tenor, Josef Schmidt, had died in the same city under tragic circumstances. He was only 38 years old whereas Lichtegg had the good fortune to make relatively old bones and, thanks to Archipel/Andromeda, we can now enjoy his recorded legacy. The transfers, from commercial discs and broadcast sources, are mostly excellent and we're provided with some useful annotation.

PHOTOGRAPHY: ERICH AUERBACH/GETTY IMAGES

THE RECORDING



**Max Lichtegg:
A Voice for Generations**
Andromeda ④ ⑧
ANDRCD 9127

Klemperer in Geneva

Geneva is the focal point for an **Otto Klemperer** programme with the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande. The date is March 6, 1957, and the recording is of a concert issued by Archiphon a couple of years ago and now subtly 'aired' sonically and granted extra depth by Pristine. Klemperer's trenchant, self-willed personality would always carve an independent course, no matter which orchestra he was visiting, and as soon as you hear the opening chords of Hindemith's *Nobilissima visione* concert suite you realise that here is a master of the very highest calibre. The closing 'Passacaglia' is memorably imposing, marginally more so I'd say than rival Klemperer versions with the Philharmonia (Warner) and the Berlin RIAS Orchestra (Audite). 'Genuine' Baroque is represented by Bach's Orchestral Suite No 3, where the celebrated 'Air' is given with breadth and affection within the context of a performance that never lacks for either muscle or energy. As for Beethoven's Symphony No 7, its most notable features are the first movement's rhetorical shifts in pulse and the way upper and lower strings wage war in the finale. Ernest Ansermet's responsive orchestra was never famed for the beauty of its woodwind sound so be warned, but Klemperer, whose temperament and ear were somewhat akin to those of the Swiss

maestro, presses all the right buttons – or, should I say, presses the buttons that the Suisse Romande were most familiar with. An exceptional concert.

THE RECORDING

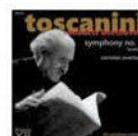


Hindemith, Bach, Beethoven
Orchestre de la Suisse
Romande / Klemperer
Pristine Audio ⑧ PASC475

Toscanini conducts the Eroica, live in 1949

Three recordings of Beethoven's *Eroica* Symphony appear in **Arturo Toscanini's** NBC discography for RCA, two of them – from 1939 and 1953 – taken down from live broadcasts and a third, from November/December 1949, recorded at Carnegie Hall specifically for commercial release. A fourth version, also from 1949 but dating from February 19, has just been released not by RCA but by Pristine Audio, preceded by a powerful account of the *Coriolan* Overture from the same concert. As ever with Toscanini there are small differences between all these versions, the most significant (predictably perhaps) between the energised *bel canto* of 1939 – where the close of the 'Marcia funèbre' is quite heartbreakingly – and the more extrovert late statement of '53. But for me the '49 *Eroica* represents a balance between classical control and subjective elasticity, the sort of straining at the borders that inspired Haydn, on hearing the Symphony's finale, to exclaim that 'from this day forward, everything [in music] is changed'. No one in my experience has projected that dazzling newness quite as vividly as Toscanini does on his various NBC recordings, certainly not on disc. As to comparing the two 1949 recordings, the live version inhabits a less dry, more muted sound frame than its successor, but both come across as vital, warm and minutely flexible. Beam up 4'37" into the first movement on the live option, then 4'43" into its commercially recorded equivalent and you notice the extra tautness of the former, as well as the clearer timps. For all its assertiveness, there is a never a hint of posing, exaggeration, excessive rhetoric or playing merely for effect. It is, in a word, perfect. ☺

THE RECORDING



Beethoven Symphony No 3
NBC SO / Toscanini
Pristine Audio ⑧ PASC472

Books



Charlotte Gardner reads the biography of a maverick luthier:

'At the root of Hutchins's work was her belief that science was the crucial factor in producing a truly great violin'

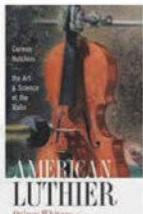
American Luthier

'Carleen Hutchins - The Art and Science of the Violin'

By Quincy Whitney

For Edge Press, HB, 312 pp, £29

ISBN: 978-1-61-168592-3



'A violin maker who crafted

some of the finest instruments of her time, invented new ones and,

through science, came as close as anyone ever has to reproducing the venerated sound of the Stradivarius.' So said the *LA Times* in its 2009 obituary of the luthier-physicist Carleen Hutchins, and to that description we could also add two Guggenheim Fellowships, four honorary doctorates, an instrument played by Yo-Yo Ma in an award-winning recording and a Metropolitan Museum of Art exhibition.

For the benefit of those who have just read the name Carleen Hutchins for the first time (and I'm anticipating that this is most readers, for which you can be unashamed because, despite the *LA Times'* lofty proclamation, Hutchins falls firmly under the bracket of 'niche'), she was born in 1911 and began her adult life simply as a school science teacher, skilled woodworker, amateur trumpet player and New Jersey housewife. However, having taken up the viola at the suggestion of a musical colleague, she decided to try making one herself. This led to a scientific partnership with a retired Harvard physicist that would result in her carving nearly 500 string instruments over the course of half a century and collaborating on over 100 experiments in violin acoustics.

At the root of Hutchins's work was her belief that science, specifically the study of acoustics, was the crucial factor in producing a truly great violin. In other words, any modern maker was capable of producing an instrument that sounded as good as a Stradivarius or Guarneri; and, to this end, at a time when the modus

operandi of luthiers was to keep secrets, Hutchins began to share her research in the manner of any other scientist, writing more than 100 technical papers, including two *Scientific American* cover articles, and founding an international society devoted to violin acoustics. One particular acoustical achievement of hers was to draw luthiers' attention to taptones – the sounds produced by a detached violin plate when held at a specific point and tapped lightly at another point.

Then there were the new instruments she fashioned. The most high-profile of these was the 'vertical viola' Yo-Yo Ma used to record Bartók's *Viola Concerto* on his 'New York Album' (Sony, 3/95). However, there was also an acoustically matching octet of violins whose painstakingly balanced proportions filled in the standard string quartet's 'gaps', ranging from a seven-foot contrabass tuned as a double bass, up to a tiny 16" sopranino tuned an octave above a standard violin.

In other words, Carleen Hutchins lived a very interesting life, and Quincy Whitney has written it up in immensely readable fashion. Bound by the linking metaphor of a fugue, *American Luthier*'s chapters alternate Hutchins's story and the physics of violin acoustics with the history of the violin and of art meeting science. Throughout, Whitney dives fearlessly, lucidly and even entertainingly into what is sometimes by necessity quite academic or technical information.

As for the book's enthusiastic reports on the actual sound quality of Hutchins's instruments, I emerged slightly less convinced. For instance, none of the stories of teary-eyed praise for her instruments seemed to emanate from the very top echelons of the soloists' world. The big-name admiration stories consist of a flirtation never followed through from Leopold Stowowski, and Ma's one-off Bartók experiment, and with the latter there are enough reviews, including in *Gramophone*, to suggest that Ma's non-continuance of engagement was because the instrument wasn't quite good enough



Richard Fairman on the collected letters of Britten and Pears:

'The exchange of letters in 1974, when Pears was singing in the US premiere of Death in Venice, forms a very moving climax'

to warrant it, rather than because he was cowed by 'social pressure' as claimed by Hutchins, and my own listening leads me to the former opinion. Likewise, look up recorded performances of the octet and, yes, the contrabass packs a punch, but the overall impression is of an interesting acoustic experiment rather than of the string world's missing puzzle piece. Yet Whitney leaves the praise for it unchallenged, which feels all the more striking when measured against her clear criticism of Hutchins's personal choices of prioritising work over husband and children.

Still, even if Whitney's critical musical ear could have been sharper, this is still a beautifully written portrait of a woman doing extraordinary work at a time when women were not encouraged to be extraordinary beyond the domestic sphere, and who left an indisputable scientific and mindset legacy in the process.

As the book nears its conclusion we read: 'Carleen Hutchins is as visible or invisible as those who know her want to acknowledge,' and I love the gauntlet this throws down. Read the book, listen to the recordings, talk to luthiers and make up your own mind. **Charlotte Gardner**

My Beloved Man

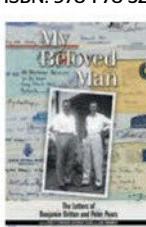
'The Letters of Benjamin

Britten and Peter Pears'

Edited by Vicki P Stroehner, Nicholas Clark and Jude Brimmer

Boydell Press, HB, 440pp, £25

ISBN: 978-1-78-327108-5



Imagine if we had the wealth of primary sources for Monteverdi or Bach that we possess for Britten. There would be no more questions about when a major work was composed or for what occasion, let alone tracking down lost masterpieces. Biographers could exercise themselves on issues like the late flowering of the cherry

tree or finding a mate for the pet dachshund.

We are already spoilt for Britten the letter writer. The six volumes of *Letters from a Life*, exhaustively edited by Donald Mitchell, Philip Reed and Mervyn Cooke, are an invaluable resource. It might be thought that a new volume of letters could offer little more, and there is inevitably some overlap between *Letters from a Life* and this new publication; but focusing on one particular, life-changing relationship has a powerful logic.

My Beloved Man is, quite simply, a love story. By bringing together for the first time all 365 letters that comprise the surviving correspondence between Britten and his lifelong partner, Peter Pears, the book enables us to follow their relationship equally from both sides. Early infatuation gives way to emotional security, the passing recriminations and apologies of middle age to the unforgettable, heartfelt letters at the close.

Take the stream of affectionate nicknames. Pears likes to address Britten as 'my honey pot' or 'my bunch of blue ribbons'. To Britten, Pears is 'poppetto mio' or 'my poppage'. The terms of endearment leapfrog each other until Pears caps them all with 'my most beautiful of all little blue-grey, mouse-catching, pearly-bottomed, creamy-thighed, soft-waisted, mewing cat-pursuers!'. And how unexpectedly frank is the farewell to that letter: 'I kiss your navel & your tummy & your groin & you.'

The letters fall inevitably in those periods when the pair were separated, usually because Pears was singing abroad. That means regular expressions of regret at being parted on both sides, while Britten tends to worry about Pears's safety and Pears responds by asking diligently after Britten's many illnesses. 'Don't get up too late & miss trains,' finger-wags Britten when Pears is away in the US. 'You are so sweet taking all the blame for our miserable tiffs, our awful nagging heart-aches,' writes Pears



Benjamin Britten and Peter Pears: 'two lives so intertwined that one could never imagine them being parted'

consolingly, 'but I know as well as I know anything that it is really my fault.'

Insights into their opinions on music, both Britten's and other composers', pepper the letters. It is fascinating to read Pears giving a critique of the *Variations on a Theme of Frank Bridge*, or apologising for having criticised some of Britten's songs (unfortunately he does not say which). From the other side it is notable that there is only ever praise for Pears's singing. 'You particularly are superb,' writes Britten, 'but then you always are, even when you think you aren't!'

Other performers are not so lucky. Anybody who knows the composer's recording of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* might be surprised to find that he thought Elizabeth Harwood's Tytania 'little short of disastrous...always sloppy and scoopy'. Nor is Pears at all keen (professional jealousy?) on Sophie Wyss's recording of *Les illuminations*: 'A performance like that surely can't wear so well – I mean when you've heard it twice, you've heard it all, which is wrong.' Among close associates, George, Earl of Harewood is accused of 'ghastly, filthy behaviour'. With

Rostropovich, more affectionately, Britten reports 'wild and dotty conversation'.

In the end, though, it is for the protagonists themselves that this volume of letters is essential reading. Once Britten has become an invalid following heart surgery and Pears is left to pursue his career alone, the letters take on new depth and an unspoken awareness that time is short. The famed exchange of letters in 1974, when Pears was singing in the US premiere of *Death in Venice* at the Metropolitan Opera, New York, forms a very moving climax. 'I do love you so terribly...and honestly you are the greatest artist there ever was,' writes Britten. 'I am here as your mouthpiece and I live in your music,' replies Pears.

After that, the final chapter makes sadly one-sided reading. Pears writes home about his tour of the US and Canada, trying to enthuse his housebound partner, but no replies come. It is hard suddenly to accept the silence after the give-and-take of a lifetime of letters. That, after all, is what makes this volume so absorbing: it is the story of two lives so intertwined that one could never imagine them being parted. **Richard Fairman**

Classics RECONSIDERED



Bartók

Duke Bluebeard's Castle

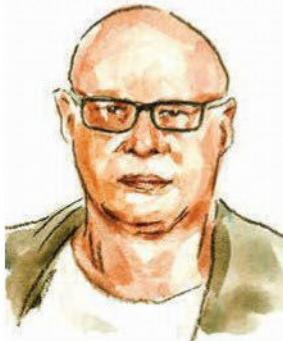
Walter Berry bass Duke Bluebeard

Christa Ludwig mezzo-soprano Judith

London Symphony Orchestra / István Kertész

Decca Legends ® 466 377-2

This issue of Bartók's early opera must count as one of Decca's great operatic recordings, to be treasured by all who appreciate this marvellous score. It's conceived as a *dramatic* performance, with changing perspectives as the characters enter the darkness of Bluebeard's castle and move around to the various forbidden



Tim Ashley and Andrew Farach-Colton
on Decca's 1966 recording of *Duke Bluebeard's Castle* by Bartók, with Walter Berry and Christa Ludwig under István Kertész



doors. If this were all, it would be a question only of individual preference, since the essential drama of the piece lies not in its external action, which is symbolic, but in the mind – though whether Bluebeard's or one's own can be argued. But it is by no means all. The two singers (a husband-and-wife team) not only have more beautiful voices than their competitors (one can believe in the seductive power of *this* Judith), but sing far more expressively and flexibly, with subtle colourations of tone and a real sense of drama. For all that the opera is sung in

Hungarian, it is possible to follow the changing moods of the characters with ease – in fact, it is impossible *not* to be carried away by the performance. Then there is the orchestral playing, under Kertész, which can be described only as ravishing: the warmth and beauty of tone are matched by wonderful finesse of accentuation and dynamics. And finally the recording, which is astonishingly evocative and full of atmosphere, allowing everything to be heard yet without thrusting detail under our noses. This is a thrilling recording of a great work. **Lionel Salter** (5/66)

Tim Ashley It's been quite fascinating going back to Kertész's *Bluebeard* again, having not heard it for some time. On its release in 1966, Lionel Salter considered it one of Decca's great operatic achievements. The work itself wasn't as familiar then as it is now, and most of the available recordings weren't in Hungarian or so strikingly cast. Then there was the LSO and its new Principal Conductor – Kertész took up his post in the summer of 1965 – who are simply formidable together here. It still strikes me as shockingly strong and as having more than stood the test of time.

Andrew Farach-Colton I wholeheartedly agree, Tim. In fact, I'd go so far as to say that this is one of those rare recordings that's wholly satisfying in every aspect. Even the sound is still absolutely stunning, more than 50 years on. Sure, one could quibble about a few of the production decisions – making Ludwig's voice more reverberant in the treasury scene, for instance – but that was Decca's style at the time (call it the Culshaw Effect, perhaps). What makes this recording so special to my mind, however, is how the

conductor, singers and orchestra all appear to be of the same interpretative mind. It feels entirely cohesive and complete.

TA There's a great singularity of purpose, certainly, and the calculated sound adds to the vividness of the whole enterprise more successfully than it does in other recordings of the same period – Solti's *Salomé*, for instance, where the shifting perspectives seem too contrived. Bartók claimed that the castle itself, represented by the orchestra, was just as much a character as the two protagonists, while Béla Balázs, the librettist, wrote that the building was an organic representation of Bluebeard's own soul and that 'when [Judith] walks in it, she walks in a living being'. It's a very Gothic idea, very Edgar Allan Poe, very *The Fall of the House of Usher*, which perhaps explains the violence of the electronic 'sigh' when Judith first touches the walls. There's an almost unnerving physicality to it all, though, which far transcends any intervention on the part of engineers and which ultimately derives from Kertész's way with the score and the LSO's playing.

AF-C Oh, yes, those 'sighs' are creepily effective. I'm not sure I'd describe them as violent, exactly.

TA They're more extreme than on any other recording, I know, though.

AF-C Indeed, and they do help to suggest a Gothic atmosphere as well as the sense of the castle as a character in itself. Honestly, I hadn't connected Balázs with Poe, but you're right; it's extremely likely he would have been familiar with Baudelaire's translations, which had already been in print for half a century when the libretto was prepared.

TA There's great compassion as well as menace, though, I think.

AF-C Yes. Then again, I don't think it's too much of a stretch to jump from the Gothic world of Poe and Baudelaire to the expressive symbolism of Maeterlinck and Debussy. Returning to this recording, and marvelling at Kertész's extraordinarily subtle, and supple, realisation of the orchestral part, underscores just how



Real-life husband-and-wife team Christa Ludwig and Walter Berry perform with expressive intensity

influential *Pélleas et Mélisande* was for both Balázs and Bartók. I've always valued Kertész for his energy and no-nonsense style, but here his direction is so pliant, even delicate. There are moments when he hits hard, and aptly so – when Judith pounds desperately on the first door at the end of the prologue, or before she opens the sixth – but my overall impression is of profound lyrical melancholy that's achieved largely through careful shading, instrumental balance and rhythmic flexibility.

TA I'm struck by the relationship between speed and pace in Kertész's conducting. It's a performance that *feels* fast in its search for dramatic tension, but at 59 minutes, it's comparatively spacious. Iván Fischer's 2003 recording for Philips, for instance, takes several minutes off Kertész's running time, but *feels* slower in an interpretation that strives more for introversion.

AF-C Kertész really does keep the music moving, but it never feels hurried; it flows naturally. The orchestral playing follows suit, in a way. The macabre passages in the torture chamber scene, say, are vividly

coloured but the tone is never pushed or ugly. I assume this is what Kertész wanted. The LSO plays with impeccable finesse. The strings are silken – even when the fifth door reveals the vastness of Bluebeard's kingdom. And I was especially exhilarated by the rhapsodic quality of the playing, as it reveals so much underlying emotion. That clarinet solo after Judith first hears the castle sighing is ravishingly eerie, and when the violas take up the same figure, it sounds so earnest, so spontaneously song-like.

TA The singing itself, it strikes me, is wonderfully lyrical as well, as one might expect from a husband-and-wife team noted, above all, as major exponents of Mozart, Bach and Strauss. There's none of the syllabic, declamatory approach you find on some other recordings. Lionel Salter was right in pointing out how 'dramatic' the performance is: there's a sense here of two rounded, separate characters, rather than some kind of pseudo-Jungian internal dialogue.

AF-C Do you agree with his assessment of the characterisations?

TA I think they go deeper than he implies. A nervous edge lurks beneath Ludwig's affection and 'seductiveness', and her near-hysterical demand for Bluebeard to open the seventh door is frightening in the extreme. And I don't think that Berry 'suggests neither *Angst* nor impatience' [as Rob Cowan wrote in his review of the reissue, 4/95]. He becomes increasingly wary throughout. What always touches me is his tenderness in the final scene. The real revelation – and shock – at the end here is that, far from being the psychopath everyone suspects, he still loves his former wives. It's a genuinely tragic interpretation.

AF-C He does become increasingly wary – and weary, too. From the opening of the sixth door, Berry conveys the sense that Bluebeard is acutely aware that this is a pattern that will repeat itself again, and one feels him resigning himself to the fact that he must love his wives in this way. I agree that it's heartbreakingly sad. We seem to agree on every point, actually. Is there any significant flaw that you can think of? What about the omission of the spoken prologue?

TA It's the one place, I think, where the recording shows its age, since performances nowadays, whether live or on disc, tend to include it. I'm ambivalent about it, in truth – whether it works or not seems to depend on how it's done. Those opening string phrases can go for nothing if you've got someone ranting loudly over them. Fischer includes the prologue on his recording, and speaks it himself in a kind of sexy, insidious whisper that adds to, rather than detracts from, the creepiness of the start. But if it's not done that well, I'd rather it were left out. Fischer's version, almost horribly reined in but with nerves at breaking-point throughout, is the only one that equals the Kertész recording in my opinion, incidentally. Are there any other versions that you rate as highly?

AF-C Yet again, we seem to be very much of the same mind! Kertész and Iván Fischer offer quite different yet complementary views, and for anyone who loves this opera, both versions are indispensable. I would add that, in these days of historically informed performance practice, it's a gift to have several recordings with Mihály Székely, who sang Bluebeard in a 1936 Budapest production under Bartók's supervision – and with his enthusiastic approval, apparently. Székely's 1956 Hungaroton recording under János Ferencsik (who also worked with the composer) is not a top choice perhaps, but is nonetheless a significant, illuminating and utterly riveting document. **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Haydn's non-nicknamed symphonies

Most of Haydn's numerous symphonies that enjoy regular performances have popular nicknames – but at least 77 of the total 107 are without such labels. **Geraint Lewis** explores these unfairly neglected treasures

When I was a child, I was introduced to the magic of Haydn by means of the *Surprise Symphony*, aka No 94 in G; I soon moved on to the *Clock*, the *Military*,

the *Miracle*, the *Drumroll*, the *London* and the *Oxford* symphonies before exploring the more exotic wonders of *L'ours*, *La poule* and *La reine*. The public affection that led to these largely harmless appellations is

easy enough to understand, and some of them make obvious musical sense too. But just as fascinating is the confusion that led to No 96 acquiring the label *Miracle*, when the event in question – the sudden crashing down of a huge chandelier at the back of the balcony of the King's Theatre, London, from which the audience had moved down to the front in order to gaze at Dr Haydn presiding below on stage, thus miraculously avoiding fatalities – occurred during the premiere of No 102!

The most obvious side effect of these colourful nicknames is to spotlight random attributes of certain works – just think of the *Farewell*, the *Mercury*, the *Maria Theresa* or the *Schoolmaster* – to the complete neglect of others. Concert programmers and recording executives quite naturally focus on the immediately attractive and instantly identifiable, so that even within the best-known mature sets for Paris and London, 82 *Bear*, 83 *Hen* and 85 *Queen* are much better known than 84, 86 and 87, just as 93, 95, 97, 98 and 99, let alone the wonderful 102, are neglected when compared with their monikered siblings. The glorious No 88 was even known for a time as the *Letter V*, after a long-forgotten cataloguing system, at the expense of the lovely No 89; and the accidentally immortalised *Oxford* (No 92) quite unfairly overshadows both 90 and 91. A nickname is never a guarantee of musical superiority but merely a passport to much greater popularity.

The recent issuing as a box by Decca of the first complete (composite) collection of the 107 symphonies as played on period instruments provides as good a reason as any to pick a handful of those that have languished without benefit of fancy titles and to cover, in so doing, the 40-odd years of Haydn's protean production in distinguished recordings which span an even longer stretch of gramophone history. ❶



Haydn (1732-1809): his nicknamed symphonies are held in great affection, but others have been neglected as a result



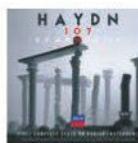
No 2 in C (1757-60)
Academy of Ancient Music /
Christopher Hogwood
Decca (4/94)
Haydn's first 15 or so

symphonies were written between 1757 and 1760 for the orchestra of one Count Morzin to play at his castle in Lukavec, Bohemia. Although No 1 has acquired a certain notoriety in being the accredited start of an astonishing journey, No 2 is far more quirky, even eccentric, and is uniquely through-composed, with no repeats. In this 1990 recording (also included in the new Decca box-set), Hogwood is crisp and fiery, with no intrusive harpsichord continuo to sully the clean textures.



No 13 in D (1763)
Philharmonia Hungarica /
Antal Dorati
Decca (10/73)
Morzin's bankruptcy in 1760

left Haydn high and dry, but he was snapped up by the much richer Esterházy family in May 1761. The composer now had a new set of brilliant players at his disposal; a series of works vividly played to their strengths and the sumptuous acoustic of the magnificent hall at Eisenstadt. No 13 deploys four horns noisily and the slow movement is virtually a cello concerto. Dorati's 1972 cycle was the first complete one available commercially and retains its unique authority.



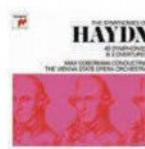
No 39 in G minor
(c1766/67)
Orchestra of the Age
of Enlightenment /
Frans Brüggen Decca (6/99)

The sudden death of Prince Paul Anton Esterházy in 1762 was an unexpected blip, but the succession of his brother Nikolaus was to prove the defining moment in Haydn's career. At the same time, an emotional crisis shook Austro-German culture in general, and the *Sturm und Drang* movement found its earliest symphonic expression from Haydn in this nervy, agitated and deeply emotional work, which Brüggen conveys in 1994 with passionate intensity.



No 46 in B (1772)
Academy of Ancient Music /
Christopher Hogwood
Decca (10/96)
Prince Nikolaus hated

most public duties, so he built a new palace - Esterháza - on a remote swamp in Hungary and from 1766 tried to spend most of his time there in splendid isolation, apart from the essential company of Haydn and his musicians. Emerging from the tense *Sturm und Drang* years, Haydn found a new lease of symphonic energy - which Symphony No 46 embodies with brilliance and colour, qualities jumped upon with glee by Hogwood in 1993.



No 56 in C (1774)
Vienna State Opera Orchestra /
Max Goberman
Sony (6/64; 4/15)
The Haydn mogul HC Robbins

Landon called his autobiography *Horns in High C*, after an exhilarating sound used in the Esterháza symphonies in C - 'alto' horns in the high register. Landon produced these sessions in Vienna having just edited all the symphonies in score, and he also commissioned special horns. Goberman's sudden death in 1962 tragically stopped a pioneering cycle in mid-flow, but Symphony No 56, recorded in 1960/61, finds him at his energetic best.



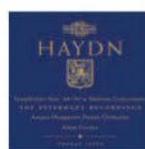
No 79 in F (1784)
Accademia Bizantina /
Ottavio Dantone
Decca (3/16)

A new contract in 1780 enabled Haydn to deal with outside organisations, and as early as 1782 he was negotiating with publishers in London. Symphonies Nos 79-81 were written with half an eye on the commercial market, but this urbanely polished work suddenly casts off care in the slow movement with a charming little go-home dance! This first recording (from 2015) on period instruments (also included in the new Decca box-set) is delightfully pointed and perky, and lifts the curtain on a lost world.



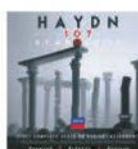
No 84 in E flat (1786)
Concentus Musicus Wien /
Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Deutsche Harmonia Mundi (8/05)
With the Austrian Marie

Antoinette as Queen of France attending the glamorous concerts of the Loge Olympique, Paris, for Haydn's brilliant new symphonies (the composer staying at home on his swamp), a degree of celebrity was guaranteed; but in common with its counterparts, Symphony No 84 takes Haydn's mastery to a new level of sophistication, which Harnoncourt reveals to the full in this 2001/02 recording that observes all the repeats to wonderful architectural effect.



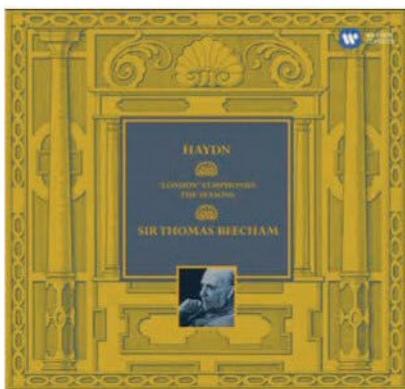
No 89 in F (1787)
Austro-Hungarian Haydn
Orchestra / Adam Fischer
Nimbus (1/94)

Taking a further chance on the Parisian market, Haydn sent Nos 88 and 89 there with Esterházy court violinist Johann Tost, who turned out to be a bit of a 'wide boy'. This charming piece - some of whose music ingeniously recycles material written originally for the king of Naples - is a genuine Cinderella that has too long been deprived of a chance to shine. This recording from 1991 was made in the very Eisenstadt hall where Haydn often worked, now called the Haydlsaal.



No 98 in B flat (1792)
Orchestra of the 18th Century /
Frans Brüggen
Decca (9/94)

Footloose and fancy-free after Nikolaus's death (1790), Haydn fled to London, where for the first time he faced large, enthusiastic audiences in person. He pays his moving tribute to Mozart (who died late in 1791) in No 98's heartfelt slow movement, while in the finale he plays a joke by adding a tiny solo for the fortepiano as if to prove that he's actually doing something when sitting behind it! Brüggen leads his forces superbly in this 1992 recording (also included in the new Decca box-set).



No 102 in B flat (1794-95)

Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / Thomas Beecham
EMI Classics (4/60; 11/60)

On his second visit to London, Haydn's concerts moved from the Hanover Square Rooms to the larger King's Theatre in the Haymarket, and the size of the orchestra increased, too. No 102 is often claimed as his greatest symphony. The slow movement breathes a romantic nostalgia, its music also existing as a piano trio for a new lady friend (a late romance that was not to be?). Even if

this symphony lost its chance of fame by not having the *Miracle* nickname, it became a best-kept secret among Haydn experts. Haydn's London critics were spot on when they called him the 'Shakespeare of music'. Sir Thomas Beecham's 1958 recording is part of the first complete cycle of London symphonies. I still find him in full command, with a Haydn-esque twinkle in his eye.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Beethoven's *Eroica*

The 'tremendous' Third Symphony is both great music and a force beyond music. How, asks **Richard Osborne**, have conductors met this challenge during the work's 90-year-long recorded history?

Writing in his diary in Houston on February 10, 1966, Sir John Barbirolli pondered, 'Strange how the *Eroica* exhausts me these days. It may well be because I am really beginning to plumb its depths. It really is a tremendous piece, isn't it?'

'Tremendous' is the right word for the *Eroica*, whether it's used as a term of general approbation or as a description of a symphony before which musicians and audiences do, indeed, have cause to tremble.

In 1967 the BBC Symphony Orchestra invited **Barbirolli** to record the *Eroica*. Broad in tempo and richly sung, it is a reading that's fathoms deep. Off-trend at the time, it obviously awed the BBC players, much as it had awed the Berlin Philharmonic earlier that same year. And herein lies a dilemma. When the Berliners played the *Eroica* under Karajan in London in 1958, Neville Cardus noted that the work was presented 'as a strongly shaped example of musical art, not entirely as a force beyond music'. The fact is, this timeless manifestation of the imperturbability of the human spirit is both: an incomparably crafted artwork and a force beyond art.

The *Eroica*'s defining document, written during the time of its composition in 1802-3, is the Heiligenstadt Testament in which the 31-year-old Beethoven reveals how encroaching deafness has brought him close to suicide but how, counselled by his art, he has resolved on patience. 'I hope my determination will remain firm to endure until it pleases the inexorable Parcae [Fates] to break the thread.'

The *Eroica* is a mountain of a symphony. The ascent is steep and problematic, with a peak (the terrifying diminished seventh at bar 166 of the *Marcia funebre*) that is reached after a fugal trek through a landscape which becomes ever more

forbidding. The descent is a joy, yet we remain on the same mountain, and like all descents it also has its perils.

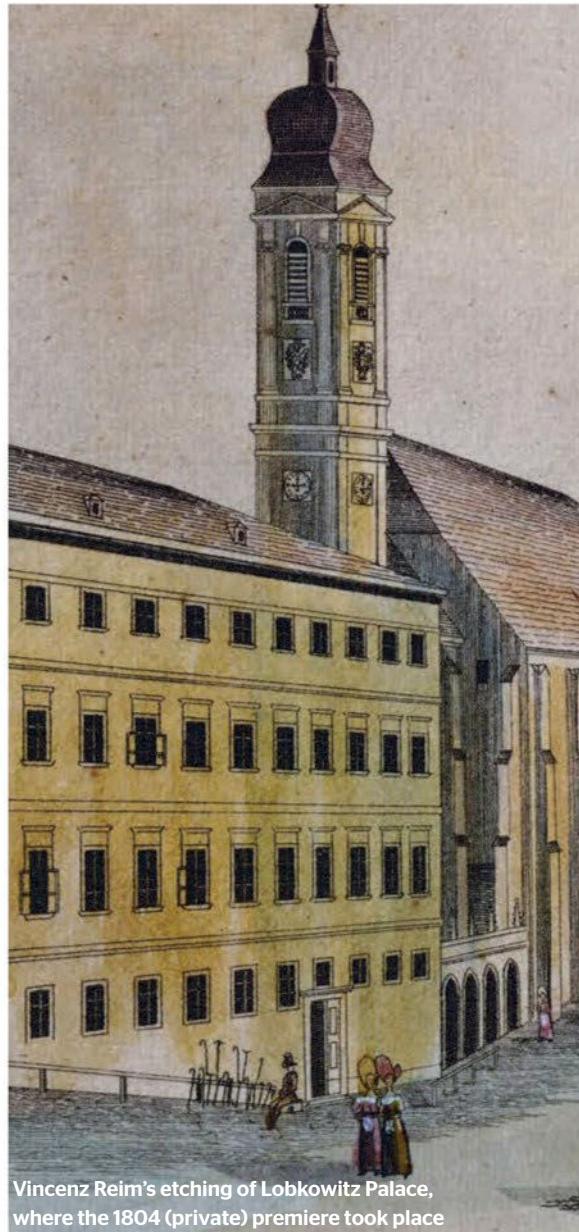
For that final movement Beethoven takes the world-defying, life-affirming Prometheus as his guide. It's a movement, unique for its time, which is tied thematically to things that have gone before. When the fugal variations cease and a solo oboe sounds the start of the *Poco andante*, Beethoven is recasting at a higher pitch and in a major key one of the *Marcia funebre*'s darkest memories. Donald Tovey likened the moment to the opening of the gates of Paradise; and Wilhelm Furtwängler must have thought likewise, since he greatly extended the pause (edited out in his studio recordings) before the oboe's entry.

The *Eroica* is unique in another sense. It is the first symphony in history to invite what we now call 'interpretation' (as early as 1807, audiences were offered printed explanations), though interpretation was hardly a factor in its earliest days. As with many 'period' performances of the 1980s, simply playing the notes was a sufficient challenge. It was not until Wagner's arrival on the scene in the 1840s that forensic examination of the music's inner content began in earnest.

FURTWÄNGLER AND TOSCANINI

Furtwängler and Toscanini, two of the *Eroica*'s most powerful interpreters, were heirs to that forensic thinking. It also happens that their own most musically devastating performances date from the years before and during the Second World War, when Europe was once again blighted by conflict and the posturings of charismatic leaders, much as it had been at the time of the symphony's creation.

That said, **Arturo Toscanini** always presented himself as a literalist. 'Is-a not



Vincenz Reim's etching of Lobkowitz Palace, where the 1804 (private) premiere took place

Napoleon! Is-a not 'Itler! Is-a not Mussolini! Is-a *Allegro con brio!*' he screamed at the BBC SO during a rehearsal in 1937. A volcanic live performance with the NBC Symphony Orchestra dates from the following year, though it's the live 1939 Victor recording which is to be preferred now that the sound has been tidied up. It marries high-tension drama with beautifully proportioned lines and a *Marcia funebre* that moves like a progress of the Stations of the Cross. It's a very Italianate reading, the mood of the Verdi Requiem not far distant. Yet nothing can detract from its humanity or searing impact. If there is a downside, it's that there are places in the finale where the playing seems rushed. There is a similarly vivid 1953 performance but the rhythms are a touch more sclerotic and one misses



the oboe-playing of Robert Bloom which is so sublime a feature of the two pre-war performances.

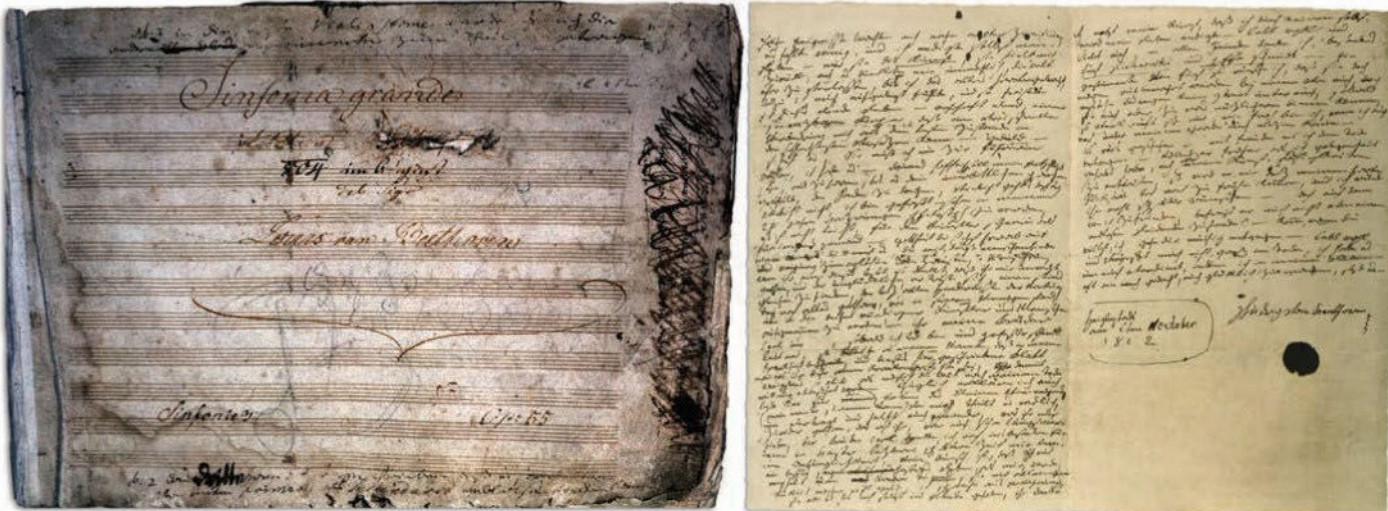
Toscanini was peerless in the Seventh Symphony, where rhythm is the wellspring. In the *Eroica* – a vast symphonic drama where rhythm is linked to a new form of differential gearing which drives and co-ordinates Beethoven's extraordinary aggregation of images and ideas – **Wilhelm Furtwängler** was the greater master. No conductor on record is more meticulous in his observation and realisation of Beethoven's lavish array of dynamic markings. Given the depth of sound the *Eroica* demands if its impact is to be fully felt, this is an astonishing feat, both by him and the Vienna and Berlin orchestras with which he principally worked.

Since the release of the technically excellent post-war RIAS recordings, it's arguable that Furtwängler's live 1950 Berlin performance is the one to have, though in the high peaks of the *Marcia funebre* and in the finale, the 1944 Vienna performance remains unsurpassed. An early LP of the 1944 version transferred the single-microphone, reel-to-reel Magnetophon recording a semitone sharp, making the performance seem brighter (and faster) than it was. But it comes up very well in the newest CD transfer.

None of Furtwängler's contemporaries in pre- and post-war Berlin came close to matching him in the *Eroica*, though **Paul van Kempen**'s 1951 Philips recording with Furtwängler's own Berlin Philharmonic was rightly held in high regard.

THE EARLY YEARS

The effective history of the *Eroica* on record began with the arrival within a year of one another of electrical recording and the 1927 Beethoven centenary. **Henry Wood**, who had already made a heavily cut acoustic recording, and Albert Coates were the first out of the blocks: an apt phrase given the frenetic pace at which both conductors take the first movement. The Coates is not only fast but impossibly wayward. Wood has the better orchestra and an altogether surer structural grasp. His account of the *Marcia funebre* has pathos without sentimentality, a very English solution at the time. Wood's younger contemporary Sir **Thomas Beecham** didn't record the *Eroica* (one of the few Beethoven pieces he genuinely admired) until 1951–52.



Beethoven's autograph title page for his personal copy of the full score (left), and two pages from his autograph Heiligenstadt Testament of October 1802

(for Columbia). Distinguished by fine wind-playing, it is a performance of intelligence and sensibility, characteristically alert.

Between 1927 and 1936 recordings by Max von Schillings, Hans Pfitzner, Willem Mengelberg and Serge Koussevitzky commanded the catalogue. Mengelberg draws glorious playing from the New York Philharmonic, but swooning string *portamentos* in the *Marcia funebre* are an offence in any age. Koussevitzky's 1934 London Philharmonic Orchestra set was admired in its day, but his grasp of the symphony's architecture would be firmer, and the playing no less vivid, when he re-recorded it with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1945 (RCA, 5/70 – also nla). In the end it was Felix Weingartner's 1936 recording with the Vienna Philharmonic which cornered the pre-war market. 'Good lean beef' was the phrase coined by Peter Stadlen to describe Weingartner's Beethoven. Only a somewhat matter-of-fact feel to the playing of the *Marcia funebre* and an indeterminate touch with the finale rob the performance of an assured place in the pantheon.

LP AND THE ARRIVAL OF STEREO

A good *Eroica*, Deryck Cooke noted in these columns, needs 'not only a splendid line but a tense rhythmic impulse; not only

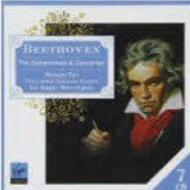
a savage strength but a sense of mystery'. He was writing (with approval of everything except the recorded sound) about the second of Jascha Horenstein's two LP recordings. There were a number of such recordings in the early days of LP, none more distinguished than Erich Kleiber's with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw Orchestra. Classically conceived, with a fine balance between the symphony's dramatic and expressive elements, it has many of the same qualities as Toscanini's post-war accounts, without the sense of the machine being in permanent overdrive. Some thought George Szell a machine. 'Yes, but a very good one,' retorted Otto Klemperer. Szell's 1957 Cleveland *Eroica* proves Klemperer's point. Here is discipline without regimentation, and an attention to detail, meticulously registered by the orchestra, that is little short of breathtaking.

The arrival of stereophonic sound in 1957 was a red-letter day for the *Eroica*, both for the spatial dimensions it provided and for the revelations its brought in the finale, where Beethoven lavishes enormous care on the part-writing for the strings. Two great interpreters who survived into the stereo age and who continued to seat their violins antiphonally were Klemperer and Pierre Monteux.

PERIOD-INSTRUMENT CHOICE

LCP / Norrington Erato ⑧ 083423-2

With the London Classical Players, the finest period-instrument ensemble of its day, playing under the direction of the most



insightful and theatrically aware 'period' Beethovenian of the time, this gives us a sense of what, in an ideal world, an early *Eroica* might have sounded like.

DVD CHOICE

BPO / Abbado EuroArts ⑧ PVP 205 1138

Filmed in Rome in 2001 with the 67-year-old Claudio Abbado directing a youthful-looking 'touring' Berlin Philharmonic, this DVD



offers fascinating insights into how a front-rank conductor and informed interpreter of the *Eroica* articulates and manages the symphony live in performance.

It was a happy chance which led Decca, pioneer of state-of-the-art stereo sound, to invite the 82-year-old Monteux to record the *Eroica* in December 1957. It was his first recording for the company, and his first with the Vienna Philharmonic, that most musically experienced – one might say 'historically informed' – of *Eroica* orchestras. With Monteux as a wise and galvanising presence, the orchestra is at the peak of its powers, bringing a variety of weights and colours to a reading that is as remarkable for its structural reach as it is for its textural clarity and the keenness of its rhythmic articulation.

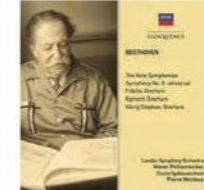
'In the *Eroica* there is no status quo,' noted Leonard Bernstein, whose 1964 New York Philharmonic performance is a wonderfully vibrant affair. Few conductors are more keenly aware of this than Monteux, whose long association with that other epoch-changing piece, Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*, clearly stood him in good stead where the *Eroica* is concerned.

One thing that may have surprised the Vienna Philharmonic was Monteux's textual purism: no extra winds and no extension to the trumpet line in the first-movement coda – this around 40 years before the publication of the modern Urtext, Jonathan Del Mar's Bärenreiter edition. (Cited but woefully misrepresented

STEREO CHOICE

VPO / Monteux Decca ⑧ ELQ480 8895

With state-of-the art stereophonic sound doing full justice to Monteux's classically correct orchestral layouts, and with the



Vienna Philharmonic in vintage form, this is a thrillingly 'complete' account. Large-scale yet vital, it's what Austro-Germans call *werktreu*, true to the original.

by David Zinman in a 1998 Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra recording in which some of Beethoven's most starkly drawn oboe lines are coyly embellished.)

Of **Otto Klemperer**'s two EMI studio recordings, it is his 1959 Abbey Road version which must have precedence, largely because of the space and degree of interior detailing stereo allows. Klemperer's is a Stoic's view of the work, one that pays homage to those 'inexorable Fates' to which Beethoven makes reference in the Heiligenstadt Testament. Yet Klemperer was also a great theatre conductor – his *Fidelio* was more or less without compare in its day – which gives the performance its own ineluctable life.

The 81-year-old **Bruno Walter** was no longer a divider of the violins when he made his 1958 Columbia Symphony Orchestra recording. It is a noble performance, rather more 'together' conceptually than his 1949 New York Philharmonic version. But with Walter's death in 1962, and Klemperer's in 1973, the age of the epic *Eroica* was largely over. The blueprint remained, but those who embraced it – conductors such as Sergiu Celibidache, Sir Georg Solti, Daniel Barenboim, and Sir Colin Davis in his 1991 Dresden version – could no longer fill the space or sustain the tension. An exception was **Carlo Maria Giulini**, whose 1978 Los Angeles recording has a touch more impetus than the strangely comatose reading that fellow countryman Victor De Sabata recorded in London in 1947. There are no divided strings and Giulini's conducting of the finale hangs fire, but his account of the *Marcia funebre* is a powerful essay in stricken grandeur and attenuated hope.

FALLOW YEARS

The years between 1960 and the arrival of period performance in the 1980s were strangely fallow. It was as if, in the words of Oscar Wilde's Lady Bracknell, 'everyone has practically said whatever they had to say, which, in most cases, was probably not much'. Eugen Jochum recorded the *Eroica* four times between 1937 and 1976; all are different, yet all sound much the same. A succession of conductors – André Cluytens, Rudolf Kempe, Ferenc Fricsay, Karl Böhm and Rafael Kubelík – were invited to record the work with the Berlin Philharmonic on the assumption that their own and the orchestra's experience would do the trick. It rarely did.

The dominant figure during these years was **Herbert von Karajan**. His earliest surviving *Eroica* is a 1944 studio recording with the Prussian State Orchestra, Berlin.



A still of Abbado from his Rome 2001 DVD

Compared with his 1952 Philharmonia account, the earlier reading is seriously undeveloped, though it offers a theatrically powerful account of the *Marcia funebre*. Karajan's essentially lyric-dramatic view of the symphony – Cardus's 'strongly shaped example of musical art' – finally came of

age in his 1962 Berlin recording, though it is arguable that his finest *Eroica* was his last, made in Berlin in 1984. There is an added urgency here that comes at no cost to the reading's Walter-like humanity and breadth of phrase.

For the rest, it was the smaller stalls which offered the fresher produce. Enigma gave us James Loughran's finely schooled reading with the Hallé (2/77 – nla) and Symphonica let Wyn Morris loose on the work (12/77 – also nla). A lifelong Furtwängler admirer, Morris conducts the *Eroica* much as Richard Burton would have declaimed it, if such a thing were possible.

THE PERIOD REVOLUTION

As the digital age dawned, only **Günter Wand**, among traditionalist interpreters, gave much satisfaction, serving up his Weingartner-style good lean beef. There was immense relief, therefore, when the early music movement stepped up to the plate.

Not everything worked. The best period-instrument accounts of the *Eroica* are closely edited studio recordings.

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS

		RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1926	Queen's Hall Orch / Wood	Beulah Ⓛ 2PD3 (4/27 th)
1936	VPO / Weingartner	Naxos Ⓛ 8 110956 (11/36 th)
1939	NBC SO / Toscanini	Music & Arts Ⓛ CD1275 (12/41 st)
1944	VPO / Furtwängler	Orfeo Ⓛ 10 C834 1189 (7/13 th)
1944	Prussian St Orch / Karajan	Koch Schwann 315092 – nla; HDN Classical Ⓛ (2/03 th)
1950	BPO / Furtwängler	Audite Ⓛ 12 AUDITE21403 (9/09)
1950	Concertgebouw Orch / E Kleiber	Decca Ⓛ 482 3952 (4/51 st)
1951	BPO / Van Kempen	Decca Eloquence Ⓛ Ⓛ ELQ482 0270 (12/54 th)
1951-52	RPO / Beecham	Sony SMK89887 – nla; Mastercorp Pty Ltd Ⓛ (1/54 th)
1952	Philharmonia / Karajan	Warner Ⓛ 2564 633735 (7/53 th)
1957	Südwestfunk Orch / Horenstein	Vox 7807 – nla; BNF Collection Ⓛ Ⓛ (4/60 th)
1957	VPO / Monteux	Decca Eloquence Ⓛ Ⓛ ELQ480 8895 (11/63 th)
1957	Cleveland Orch / Szell	Sony Ⓛ 88883 73715-2 (2/58 th)
1958	Columbia SO / Walter	Sony Ⓛ 88875 12391-2 (3/61 th)
1959	Philharmonia / Klemperer	EMI Ⓛ 10 404275-2 (3/62 th)
1962	BPO / Karajan	DG Ⓛ Ⓛ 463 088-2GB5 (2/63 th)
1964	NYPO / Bernstein	Sony Ⓛ Ⓛ 88883 71833-2 (10/66 th)
1967	BBC SO / Barbirolli	Barbirolli Society Ⓛ SJB1040 (3/68 th)
1971	BPO / Karajan	DG/Unitel Ⓛ Ⓛ 072 073 4107GH3 (5/06)
1978	Los Angeles PO / Giulini	DG Ⓛ 447 444-2GOR (5/79 th , 8/96)
1984	BPO / Karajan	DG Ⓛ 439 002-2GHS (6/86 th)
1985	NDR SO / Wand	RCA Ⓛ 88697 71144-2 (3/86 th)
1986	Academy of Ancient Music / Hogwood	Decca Ⓛ Ⓛ 452 551-20C5 (11/86 th)
1987	Orch of the 18th Century / Brüggen	Decca Ⓛ Ⓛ 478 7436DC7 (11/88 th)
1987	London Classical Players / Norrrington	Erato Ⓛ Ⓛ 083423-2 (4/89 th)
1990	COE / Harnoncourt	Teldec Ⓛ Ⓛ 2564 63779-2 (11/91 th)
1993	Orch Révolutionnaire et Romantique / Gardiner	Archiv Ⓛ Ⓛ 477 8643AB5 (11/94 th)
2001	BPO / Abbado	DG Ⓛ 471 488-2GH (11/08 th)
2001	BPO / Abbado	EuroArts Ⓛ Ⓛ 205 1138 (5/09)
2002	VPO / Rattle	EMI Ⓛ Ⓛ 915624-2 (4/03)
2008	Leipzig Gewandhaus Orch / Chailly	Decca Ⓛ 478 3494DH (A/11 th)
2012	Bavarian RSO / Jansons	BR-Klassik Ⓛ Ⓛ 900119 (12/13)
2015	BPO / Rattle	BPO Ⓛ Ⓛ (5/16 + 3 Blu-ray) BPHR160091 (6/16)

The 9th Osaka International Chamber Music Competition & Festa

May 13-21, 2017

Chamber Music Competition May 13-21, 2017

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- Performance Sections: Section I : *String Quartet*
Section II : *Wind Quintet, Saxophone Quartet and Brass Quintet*
- Jury: *Tsuyoshi TSUTSUMI (Chairman), Martin BEAVER, Paul KATZ, Yoshiko KAWAMOTO, Honggang LI, Kazuki SAWA, Rainer SCHMIDT, Claude DELANGLE, Satoshi KAMIYA, Chang-Kook KIM, Michel LETHIEC, Philip SMITH, Radovan VLATKOVIĆ*

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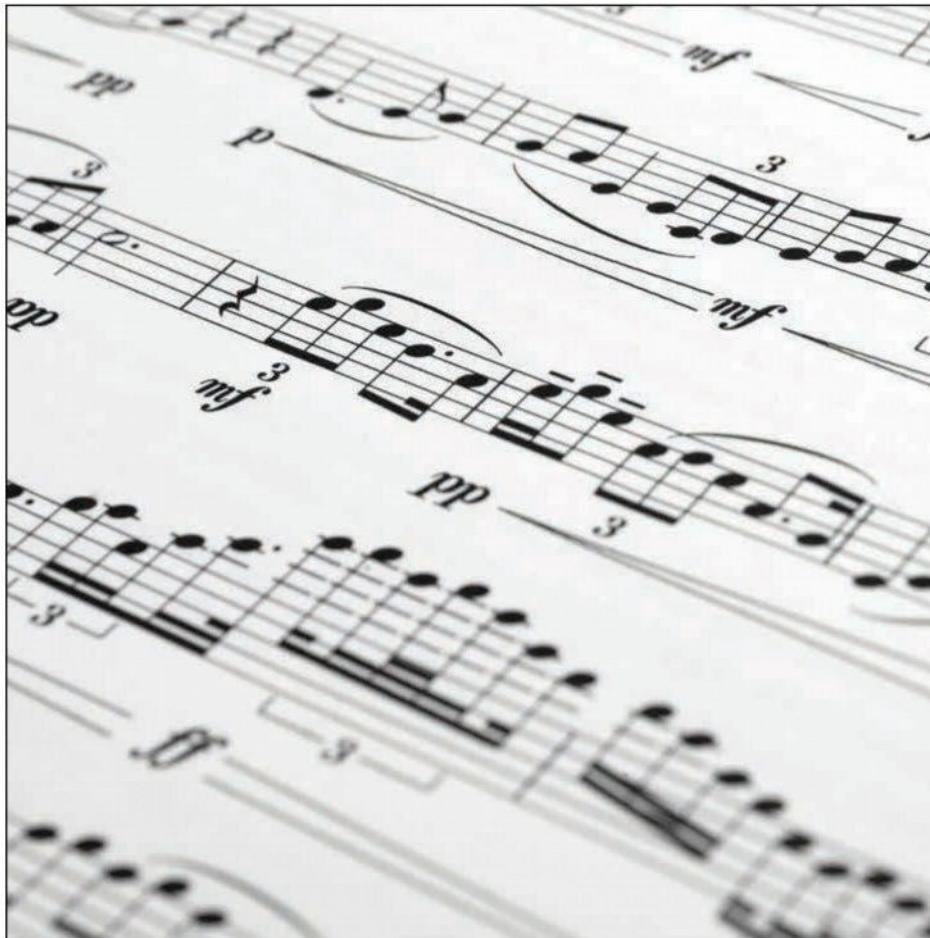
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LIVE | LEARN | CREATE



Furtwängler conducting the Berlin Philharmonic at the Titania-Palast, Berlin, on January 1, 1951

Live performances, such as **Frans Brüggen**'s large-scale, combative account with the Orchestra of the 18th Century, were generally too poorly tuned and executed to bear repetition. A classic example of the record-maker's craft is **Christopher Hogwood**'s recording with the Academy of Ancient Music, an exquisitely groomed affair whose only omission is a sense of the sheer scale and danger of the piece. **John Eliot Gardiner** and the Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique deliver those qualities in spades with pacey, virtuoso playing. Alas, the speed of delivery in the outer movements makes it virtually impossible to hear the music. By the stopwatch **Roger Norrington** is just as quick, but his relish for the music's inner content – salient detail turning up like sixpences in an old-fashioned Christmas pudding – is thrilling to hear, as is the superlative playing of the London Classical Players.

If performances such as these helped throw new light on the symphony, near disaster followed as the 'period' aesthetic took hold, convincing over-ambitious chamber ensembles, and conductors bent on forcing modern symphony orchestras into the straitjacket of a 'period' style, that by adopting the period formula they, too, might come up with comparable insights into this titanic work.

One particularly damaging piece of pseudo-historical hokum was the claim that the *Eroica* could or should be played with an orchestra, as Richard Hickox put it, 'of the size Beethoven expected when he wrote it' – as if the *Eroica* were conceived to accommodate a particular space or style. (In Beethoven's Vienna, the city's differing locations determined an orchestra's size and, indeed, the speeds at which it might play.) In order to move Michelangelo's *David* to its appointed resting place, the Florentines had to knock down the walls

of the Opera del Duomo where it was sculpted; to release Beethoven's Promethean utterance from its chains, new orchestral strategies – new ways of articulating and pacing the music – had to be devised.

The finest 'chamber' *Eroica* is **Nikolaus Harnoncourt**'s, though the Chamber Orchestra of Europe was no ordinary chamber orchestra. In size and character, this hand-picked 50-strong ensemble predicts the slimmed-down Berlin Philharmonic which COE Artistic Director Claudio Abbado would deploy in his own memorable 2001 Rome *Eroica*. Harnoncourt's is a mainstream modern-instrument performance, buoyed by its own vitality and informed by the vision of a musician whose mind was steeped in the old ways of doing things. As such, it is light years away from the legion of overquick and punitively wham-bam chamber-orchestra versions of Sir Charles Mackerras, Thomas Dausgaard and others.

THE SYMPHONY IN A NEW CENTURY

Nowadays, speed appears to be de rigueur, yet as Chanan Willner noted in an article in the *Musical Times* in February 1990, momentum in the German tradition has less to do with speed, more to do with the pacing and shaping of a symphony's dramatic and rhetorical design. One of the fastest recent performances comes from **Riccardo Chailly** and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. The first movement, in which Chailly manages to combine high-octane drive with an appropriate degree of expressivity, is a *tour de force*. But speed is addictive, and it is this which ruins the later stages of the *Marcia funebre* and the finale, where there is barely a hint of joy or spiritual uplift.

Precipitate accounts of the *Marcia funebre*, once the accelerations begin

at the oboe-led *maggiori*, are nothing new. (There is a particularly alarming example from the 91-year-old Leopold Stokowski.) But it is odd to find conductors such as **Simon Rattle** and the normally judicious **Mariss Jansons** falling foul of this, as Beethoven's dubiously fast metronome mark (dated 1817) is pursued and even overtaken. That said, there is a properly Beethovenian feel to the Jansons and to Rattle's Vienna and Berlin accounts, which is not the case with the speedy and over-refined – almost Mendelssohnian – readings of conductors such as Paavo Järvi and Osmo Vänskä.

The recording which draws together the more pertinent strands of latter-day thinking about the *Eroica*, and does so with a refinement of musical execution which protests little but says much, is **Claudio Abbado**'s live performance in Rome in 2001.

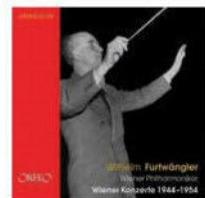
THE EROICA ON FILM

The DVD of Abbado's Rome *Eroica* is one of just two that merit mention. The first is a 1971 bespoke film directed by one of the founding fathers of the modern music video, Hugo Niebeling, with **Karajan** conducting the Berlin Philharmonic. Niebeling seats the players in three steeply raked inverted triangles, looking a little like ascending files of seats in an ancient Greek theatre with the conductor placed on the circular *orkhestra* below. There are some striking visual effects at key moments in this thrillingly articulated performance, though there would have been more had Karajan not re-edited the film. In 2009, Niebeling released the original director's cut.

The DVD of **Claudio Abbado**'s Rome performance is a model of its kind, with splendidly pertinent video direction by Bob Coles. The conductor-cam option in particular provides us with a fascinating aural-visual experience, sharpening our sense of the reading itself while at the same time providing unique insights into the mechanisms through which this astonishing artwork functions. **G**

TOP CHOICE

VPO / Furtwängler Orfeo ⑧ C834 118Y
No conductor articulates the drama of the *Eroica* – human and historical, individual and universal – more powerfully or eloquently



than Furtwängler. Of his 11 extant recordings, it is this 1944 Vienna account, closely followed by the 1950 Berlin version, which most merits pride of place.

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MUSICAL CONNECTIONS

Strauss's Four Last Songs is the starting point for two very different listening journeys

Hailing the soprano voice

The *Four Last Songs* marks a staging point on the long musical journey that has found composers luxuriating in the soprano voice. Strauss, more than many others, understood this most quintessentially feminine of voices and wrote with extraordinary sympathy, imagination and love for it (hardly surprising given that his wife Pauline was a soprano). The soprano voice, whose range occupies (roughly) two octaves upward from middle C, can float above a large symphony orchestra with ease, allowing for that long-breathed *cantilena* which forms such a central characteristic of the *Four Last Songs*. The inspiration for Mozart's concert aria shares with the Strauss an intimate relationship with the singer (Nancy Storace). The late-Romantic tradition that embraces the song-cycles of Berlioz, Wagner, Chausson and Ravel, and Mahler's song-symphony *Das Lied von der Erde*, take us closer to a world where the text yearns to liquefy into pure melody (Isolde's Liebestod the end of this

particular journey). It's a route taken by Glière who dispenses entirely with words in his Concerto for coloratura, creating an accompanied vocalise (and would it be too fanciful to hear in Richard Strauss's contemporaneous Oboe Concerto an instrumental expression of a similar melodic desire to flight?). Britten's Rimbaud settings of 1940, the nine sections gathered under the title *Les illuminations*, has, in its soprano guise (the original one), a sensuousness that the tenor version lacks.

Wallowing in James Agee's gloriously evocative words, Samuel Barber's *Knoxville: Summer of 1915* finds the soprano gently raised up on an orchestral cushion of breathtakingly vivid colours. And coming right up to date, our Contemporary Award-winner, Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* celebrates the power of the voice – here Barbara Hannigan's – to fuse with the words of Shakespeare's Ophelia. **James Jolly**

Mozart Ch'io mi scordi di te? Miah Persson BIS

Berlioz Les nuits d'été Régine Crespin Decca

Ravel Shéhérazade Régine Crespin Decca

Wagner Wesendonck Lieder Jessye Norman Decca

Glière Concerto for coloratura Eileen Hulse Chandos

Mahler Das Lied von der Erde - Abschied

Christa Ludwig; Otto Klemperer Warner

Chausson Poème de l'amour et de la mer

Susan Graham Warner

Britten Les illuminations Felicity Lott Naxos

Barber Knoxville: Summer of 1915 Karina Gauvin Naxos

Naxos

Abrahamsen let me tell you

Barbara Hannigan Winter & Winter



Strauss and Pauline: 'a stormy but contented life'

When music mirrors life

The idea of the 'late style' makes total sense in the case of Richard Strauss and his *Four Last Songs*. In his final years, largely in response to the catastrophe of Nazism and its aftermath, he produced music of an almost Mozartian refinement that sought refuge in a bucolic idea of nature, freewheeling melisma and dappled accompaniments. A prime example is the **Oboe Concerto** (1945), composed for John de Lancie, or the late **Duett-Concertino** (1947), while in **Daphne** (1938), the title character's final words dissolve into a weaving vocalise as she is transformed into a laurel tree. The *Four Last Songs* represent a summing up, too, of much of Strauss's life, with the final bars of 'Im Abendrot' harking back to the composer's early **Tod und Verklärung** ('Death and Transfiguration', 1889); but Strauss's other tone-poems, many (auto)biographical in nature, themselves imagined later life, most famously in **Ein Heldenleben**'s final sections, in which quotations of the composer's works up

until that point (1898) – the earliest being the theme from the overture to **Guntram** – are woven together before he settles down contentedly with his companion. And it's Strauss's stormy but contented life with Pauline, who had sung Freihild in the ill-fated premiere of *Guntram*, that is another central theme, both explicit and implicit, in the *Four Last Songs*, a relationship explored many times in Strauss's operas: in the watchmen's paean to marriage in **Die Frau ohne Schatten**, or in Christine's fireside nap in **Intermezzo**. '**Morgen!**', meanwhile – the last of the Op 27 songs Strauss presented to Pauline upon their wedding – looks forward, in its later orchestration, to the violin solo in the central section of 'Beim Schlafengehen'. But the **Rosenkavalier** trio must be Strauss's ultimate tribute to the female voice. It was sung in front of the devastated Pauline at his funeral and she herself died only months later. **Hugo Shirley**

R Strauss Oboe Concerto François Leleux Sony

R Strauss Duett-Concertino Paavo Järvi Pentatone

R Strauss Daphne - final scene Lucia Popp; Bernard Haitink Warner

R Strauss Tod und Verklärung Fritz Reiner RCA

R Strauss Ein Heldenleben Herbert von Karajan DG

R Strauss Guntram - Overture Eve Queler Sony

R Strauss Die Frau ohne Schatten -

Act 1, 'Ihr Gatten' Wolfgang Sawallisch Warner

R Strauss Intermezzo - Träumerei am Kamin'

Lucia Popp; Wolfgang Sawallisch Warner

R Strauss Morgen! Elisabeth Schwarzkopf Warner

R Strauss Der Rosenkavalier - Trio

Régine Crespin; Yvonne Minton; Helen Donath; Sir Georg Solti Decca



To explore these playlists via a streaming service, or to create your own, we suggest qobuz.com. You can listen to these particular playlists at gramophone.co.uk/playlists

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Mariss Jansons conducts Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades* in Amsterdam, seven conductors talk about their profession and Rattle conducts *Tristan und Isolde* at the Met

Geistag, Munich, live on BR-Klassik radio & online

65th ARD International Music Competition

Prizewinners Concert, September 16

The Gramophone Awards are not the only prominent music competition taking place this month. Germany's largest international classical music competition, the ARD International Music Competition, is also on; its former prize-winners include the Armida Quartet, who took first prize in 2012 then went on to be 2014-16 BBC New Generation Artists. This year's disciplines are double bass, harp, horn and string quartet, and you can catch the prize-winners' concert broadcast live on BR-Klassik radio. It will also be live video-streamed and, although this wasn't confirmed as we went to press, we expect it then to remain online afterwards.

br.de/ard-musikwettbewerb

Wigmore Hall & BBC Radio 3 (to be broadcast at a later date)

Jeremy Denk plays through the centuries, September 17

This piano recital from Jeremy Denk sounds fascinating, spanning as it does six centuries of Western music repertoire. This means that, as well as the more often pianistically trodden repertoire from the likes of Bach, Beethoven and Brahms, Stockhausen, Ligeti and Philip Glass, Denk also takes in the medieval and Renaissance worlds of Machaut, Frescobaldi, Binchois and Byrd. There's a nice twist at the end too, because having programmed the music chronologically, Denk will round things up after the most modern piece, Ligeti's Etude No 6, *Automne à Varsovie*, with Binchois's 15th-century *Triste plaisir*.

wigmore-hall.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

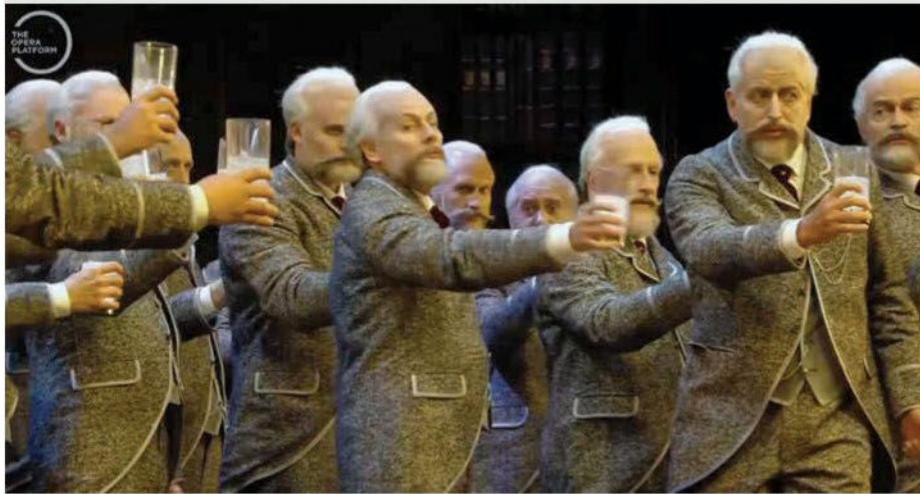
Royal Albert Hall, London & Classic FM

The ASMF leads Classic FM Live, September 20, broadcast on September 21

Classic FM Live, presented by John Suchet and Margherita Taylor, stars the radio station's Artists in Residence, the Academy of St Martin in the Fields. Topping the list of guest appearances is Maxim Vengerov, performing Méditation from Massenet's *Thaïs* and the finale of Brahms's Violin Concerto. Wayne Marshall performs on both piano and organ, with Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* and Saint-Saëns's *Organ Symphony*. Mezzo-soprano Laura Wright and the Aquarelle Guitar Quartet will also be there, and because this really is Classic FM's celebratory answer to

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

Mariss Jansons conducts Tchaikovsky's *The Queen of Spades*



Tchaikovsky

Before a note has been heard in Stefan Herheim's production of *The Queen of Spades*, we've already seen Vladimir Stoyanov, dressed as Tchaikovsky, fellating Misha Didyk as Herman. As the music swells, he downs a glass of luminous water (apparently cholera glows in the dark) and collapses, whereupon the entire opera plays out in his head: a delirious fantasy on the composer's psycho-sexual hang-ups.

That's Herheim's Big Idea, and at times it's thought-provoking (Stoyanov doubles as Liza's luckless fiancé Yeletsky). But with the entire male chorus dressed as Tchaikovsky, it quickly becomes an unwelcome distraction in a basically traditional production set in a single luxurious 19th-century apartment (with 18th-century touches). On those terms, it's effective enough. Philipp Fürhofer's expanding, contracting, lit-from-behind sets are handsome and the flashes of supernatural horror are strikingly done.

It helps that the central characters have a vocal as well as dramatic kinship. Didyk's tense, frantic singing opens out into

blazing beams of tone in his top register, just as Svetlana Aksenova's buttoned-up Liza glows and soars in her big scenes. Larissa Diadkova is poised and eerily sensuous as the Countess; together the three make a compelling trio, united by the same, electrifying sense of being people on the edge.

And they respond without hesitation – as do the Royal Concertgebouw, the chorus and the full cast – to Mariss Jansons's stupendous conducting. Wagnerian in its grandeur and psychological range, as ardent and as luminous as you could possibly wish, Jansons's reading is charged from first note to last with that buzzing nervous tension which is the life-force of this extraordinary opera. The broadcast direction is clear and straightforward, barring a couple of awkward close-ups, but if you can live with the concept, Jansons alone would be reason enough to see this *Queen of Spades* while you can.

Richard Bratby

Available to view free until October 31, 2016, at theoperaplatform.eu

Last Night of the Proms, the evening will be rounded off with Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture and fireworks.

classicfm.com

Wigmore Hall, London & live on BBC Radio 3

Steven Isserlis performs Mustonen with Mustonen, October 3

Steven Isserlis and Olli Mustonen join forces for a programme featuring Schumann's flowing Three Romances for oboe and piano Op 94, arranged for cello, Shostakovich's turbulent Cello Sonata in D minor, and connecting them a short Invention for solo cello written for Isserlis by Mustonen.

wigmore-hall.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

Royal Festival Hall, London & live on BBC Radio 3

LPO opens its season with Nicola Benedetti, September 23

Both of Szymanowski's violin concertos in one evening is an unusual piece of programming, and one well worth hearing given how very contrasting the two works are. Add acclaimed Szymanowski interpreter Nicola Benedetti as the soloist, and the London Philharmonic Orchestra's season-opening concert under the baton of Principal Conductor Vladimir Jurowski is looking very much like a red-letter evening. Furthermore, the concertos are bookended by stylistically complementary works, No 1 preceded by Debussy's atmospheric *Prélude à L'après-midi d'un faune*, and No 2 followed by Bartók's Suite from *The Miraculous Mandarin*. Very clever.

lpo.org.uk, bbc.co.uk/radio3

The Met, New York & cinemas worldwide**Rattle conducts Tristan und Isolde, October 8**

The New York Met's Live in HD 2016/17 season opens with its 100th live transmission into cinemas around the world with a production of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* first seen in Baden-Baden. Directed by Mariusz Treliński (responsible for the 2014-15 season's double bill

of *lolanta* and *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*), the cast is well worth hearing: Nina Stemme sings Isolde, Stuart Skelton is Tristan, Ekaterina Gubanova is Brangäne and René Pape sings King Marke. The conductor-shaped icing on the cake is a rare Met appearance by Sir Simon Rattle.

metopera.org/season/in-cinemas

Gasteig, Munich & live on BR-Klassik radio**Rudolf Buchbinder performs Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 1, October 14**

The Bavarian Radio SO broadcast all their Friday evening concerts on BR-Klassik radio. We're drawing your attention to this one because it features Beethoven's Piano Concerto No 1 with as soloist Rudolf Buchbinder; a true Beethoven authority, Buchbinder owns 38 editions of the complete Beethoven sonatas, has written a book, *My Beethoven: Life with the Maestro*, and has just completed a marathon five Beethoven concertos in one day at Austria's Grafenegg Festival. Mariss Jansons conducts and the programme also includes Strauss's *Alpine Symphony*.

br-so.com, br.de/radio/br-klassik

Philharmonie, Berlin & online**Nikolai Lugansky performs Rachmaninov, October 15**

This predominantly Russian night at the

Philharmonie looks well worth tuning in for. Tugan Sokhiev, musical boss of Berlin's Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester, guest conducts the Philharmonic in a colourful programme that begins with *Le chasseur maudit*, Franck's macabre symphonic poem about a count of the Rhine who dared to hunt on the Sabbath. From there it's into Russian territory, with Nikolai Lugansky the soloist for Rachmaninov's *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, before the programme winds up with Rimsky-Korsakov's exotic *Sheherazade*.

digitalconcerthall.com

Royal Opera House, Covent Garden & UK cinemas**New production of Così fan tutte, October 17**

Semyon Bychkov conducts the Orchestra of the Royal Opera House in this new production by Jan Philipp Gloger. Starring up-and-coming talent, its cast includes the American soprano Corinne Winters as Fiordiligi, while the other three young lovers are played by Angela Brower as Dorabella, Daniel Behle as Ferrando and Alessio Arduini as Guglielmo. Sabina Puertolas sings Despina and Johannes Martin Kränzle is Don Alfonso.

roh.org.uk; roh.org.uk/cinemas

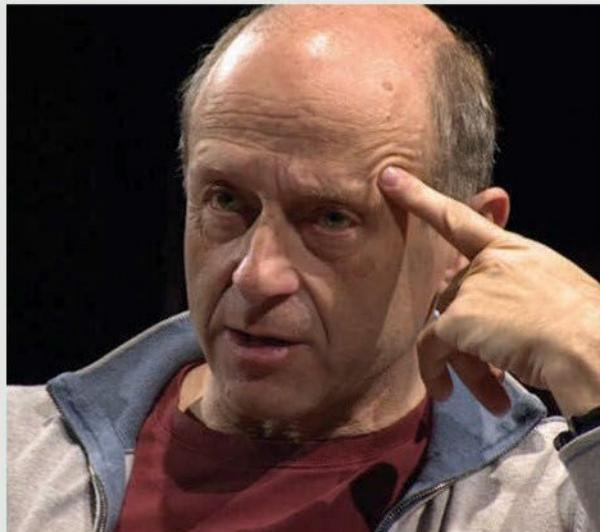
ONLINE DOCUMENTARY REVIEW

Simon Halsey in conversation with seven leading conductors in the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall**'Guardians of Unity'**

The magic that allows a single person – who alone makes no sound – to galvanise another 100-plus to create something so personal and so powerful remains, thankfully, a mystery. So it's always fascinating to hear from the practitioners and a new documentary in the Berlin Philharmonic's Digital Concert Hall archive is a must for conductorphiles.

Simon Halsey, for 14 years Chief Conductor of the Rundfunkchor Berlin, has had a ringside seat, preparing choral performances before handing over the baton to the starry maestros who actually conduct the concerts. In this film, *Guardians of Unity*, he takes on the role of interviewer for seven conductors. Each, needless to say, is unique, with a very different approach.

Zubin Mehta and Iván Fischer, both pupils of Hans Swarowsky, reveal an analytical approach to the score in question: Swarowsky believed 100 per cent in analysis and that emotion had no place



(Fischer's other teacher Nikolaus Harnoncourt believed completely in the idea of music as communication). As Fischer – who is wonderfully eloquent – puts it, the conductor's role is 'to create the unity. A radiation that 100 people express that musical moment like one person.'

Andris Nelsons dates his fascination with conducting to attending *Tannhäuser* aged five! Fischer was surrounded, as a boy, by

conversations at the dinner table about Furtwängler's interpretations of the classical masterpieces and Paavo Järvi also comes from a family of conductors and would simply absorb what his father, Neeme, was studying at any one time.

There seems to be a consensus that the manual technique *can* be taught: John Carewe, Rattle's teacher, says that 'any traffic cop could learn these gestures'. But the element of communication is where the art steps in – Rattle talks eloquently about working with the Berlin Phil and how his job is increasingly as an enabler. 'Give the impulse,' he says, 'and then get out of the way.' After all, Karajan taught the orchestra very successfully to play simply by listening to each other.

This engrossing 40-minute film leaves you wanting more: 40 minutes with *each* conductor to be precise! They are all fascinating on their elusive profession.

James Jolly

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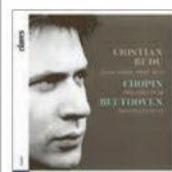
● THE TECHNOLOGY THAT MAKES THE MOST OF YOUR MUSIC ●



THIS MONTH a heavyweight amplifier from a long-serving audio favourite and digital wizardry from a famous British name. Plus, is streaming really the future of music?

Andrew Everard Audio Editor

AWARDS ISSUE TEST DISCS



A wonderfully intimate yet powerful sound in 96kHz/24bit for Christian Budu's set of Chopin Preludes and Beethoven Bagatelles on Claves.



The live ambience of the performance shines through on this recording of Mahler's Tenth by the Seattle Symphony under Thomas Dausgaard.

Hi-fi can always spring surprises

The ability of the audio industry to reinvent itself is clear in the year's most unusual all-in-one system



Every time you think you've seen everything possible in hi-fi, along comes something new to take you by surprise – and that's exactly what the Sonus faber Sf16 ① is. An all-in-one system, set to be built at the rate of just 200 a year, and selling for around £9900, this wireless music unit is the culmination of a project the company started in the 1980s, when it showed the Snail, which used speaker pods mounted on 'wings'.

The Sf16 has taken that on board with motorised speaker pods deployed from the main housing: each pod contains two 5cm ceramic midrange drivers and two 12.5mm tweeters, mounted facing forwards and backwards, while the main unit has similarly opposed 12cm aluminium/magnesium bass units. A total of 1400W of amplification is built into the Sf16, which is constructed from solid wood and aluminium, and the system supports high-resolution audio up to 192kHz/24bit, as well as streaming music services including Spotify, Tidal and internet radio. It can stream music from home servers and computers via Wi-Fi, and also supports the DTS Play-Fi wireless standard, allowing multiple compatible units to be combined. Direct audio input is also possible via analogue RCAs and optical/coaxial digital.

On the subject of wireless music systems, Yamaha is extending its already 35-strong range of MusicCast products with the addition of new speakers, AV receivers with wireless multiroom audio, another two soundbars and a stereo receiver complete with DAB radio as well as multiroom.

The £350 YAS-306 MusicCast soundbar delivers 7.1-channel surround from a single enclosure, has Bluetooth and AirPlay, and contains two built-in subwoofers. The YSP-2700 soundbar uses 16 speakers to produce 7.1-channel sound, can decode Dolby TrueHD soundtracks as well as hi-res music, has three HDMI inputs and one output, and comes with a separate wireless subwoofer. It sells for £900.

The R-N402D receiver ② is £400 and, as well as MusicCast, Bluetooth and AirPlay, has a built-in DAB/DAB+ radio tuner. It supports hi-res files up to 192kHz/24bit and DSD64/128, and has 2x140W amplification built in, along with Wi-Fi/ Ethernet connectivity and wired inputs for four analogue sources and two digital, plus outputs for two pairs of speakers.

Raumfeld, which is part of German direct-sell speaker company Teufel, has upgraded the control app for its wireless multiroom speakers ③ with an eye to power-saving: it's now possible to turn the speakers on or off from the app, while

a new 'Eco' function switches them into a power-saving standby mode when no signal is detected. In addition, a new Android widget simplifies operation with suitable smartphones and tablets.

Finally on streaming this month, NAD has announced that a new BluOS firmware update ④ is set to bring MQA support to compatible multiroom devices. BluOS is the wireless music operating system for Bluesound products, which share a parent company with NAD, while MQA is the 'audio origami' technology used to allow hi-res content to be downloaded or streamed over reduced bandwidth: Bluesound wireless audio products already support it, and now that's being extended to the NAD M12, M50, M32, and C 390DD, with a view to extending to other BluOS-capable NAD products in the future.

From streaming to vinyl, and Devon-based Timestep – which already offers upgrades for the original Technics direct-drive turntables (including a 78rpm modification) – has just announced a package of EVOke upgrades for the new 'limited edition' SL-1200GAE 'revival' model ⑤, and presumably for the forthcoming 'standard' SL-1200G version, due later this year.

The upgrades include an uprated Timestep external power supply unit at £495; a £90 mounting plate to allow any nine-inch SME tonearm to be fitted in place of the standard Technics arm, and the SME IV tonearm, at £1860, with the further option of an Audio Technica AT-33PTG/II moving coil cartridge. Timestep can provide the components separately or as a fully finished upgrade of the £2700 Technics turntable, at a price (including fitting) of £5764. ⑥

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Rotel RA-1592

A heavyweight stereo amplifier that offers competitive specification, great sound – and remarkable value for money



ROTEL RA-1592

Type Stereo integrated amplifier

Price £1899

Analogue inputs Moving magnet phono, three line on RCAs, one set of balanced inputs

Digital inputs Three optical, three coaxial, USB Type B; USB Type A on front panel
Digital input formats Up to 192kHz/24 bit

(optical, coaxial); up to 384kHz/32 bit and DSD 256 (USB)

Outputs Two sets of speakers, pre-out, two mono subwoofers, headphones

Other connections Rotel Link in/out, external remote input, 2x12V trigger out, RS232, network connection for updates

Power output 2x200W into 8 ohms

Tone controls Yes, bypassable

Accessories supplied Remote handset, CD-ROM

Dimensions (WxHxD)
43.1x14.4x42.5cm

rotel.com

After a period when it seemed the audio amplifier market was splitting into affordable entry-level integrated models, a mid-market dominated by AV receivers and then a high-end populated by pre-amplifier/power amplifier combinations, it seems big one-box amps are making a comeback. Even the top-end US brands, from a market where serious audio always used to mean more boxes, seem to have integrated models in their ranges, and of late we've seen the arrival of the likes of Denon's PMA-2500NE (reviewed last month), the hefty Anniversary version of Audio Analogue's once-slimmer Puccini and – going back a little further but still very much available – Arcam's A49. The Arcam in particular is a bellwether for this trend: the UK-based, Canadian-owned company once specialised in relatively compact amplifiers but the A49

is a monster, built in the parent company's US factory and clocking in at 200W per channel, 19.7kg and £3995.

The RA-1592 is a mighty powerful amplifier able to drive and control even the most demanding speakers with almost disdainful ease

At Rotel, scaled-up integrated amplifiers never really went away: the company's range may start with the slimline RA-10, the spiritual successor of classics such as the RA-820 models of getting on for 30 years back, but for a while it has also offered a 'reference' series of products on the grander scale. The £1895 RA-1592 is the latest arrival in this range, essentially combining the technology of the RA-1590

pre-amplifier and RB-1582MkII stereo power amplifier in a single unit.

Although not quite on as grand a scale as Arcam's flagship amplifier, standing 14.4cm tall and weighing 16.8kg still makes the RA-1592 a pretty substantial unit, and Rotel claims for it an output commensurate with its bulk, at 200W per channel into 8 ohms. But there the philosophies of the two brands diverge: while Arcam makes great play of the all-analogue design of its amplifiers, eschewing digital inputs and instead fitting a power output to supply its separate digital-to-analogue converters, Rotel has gone all-in with a full-blown digital section in the RA-1592.

This means that, as well as a moving magnet phono stage, three line inputs and one set of balanced inputs, the amp also has a full array of digital inputs: alongside three optical and three coaxial

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

Whether paired with conventional sources or computers, the Rotel amplifier will deliver...

ASUS K20CE

A compact desktop computer might be the ideal partner for the RC-1592: this little Asus K20CE is an affordable option at around £250.



FOCAL ARIA 948

Make the most of the Rotel's power and poise with some high-quality speakers, such as these Focal Aria 948s, at around £2500.



connections, all capable of handling file formats up to 192kHz/24 bit, there's also an asynchronous USB computer connection on a Type B socket, capable of 384kHz/32 bit and DSD64/128. The USB input can be switched between its default Class 1.0 operation, in which it will play audio up to 96kHz without any additional drivers required on the connected computer, while Class 2.0 will support the full range of formats but requires the installation of the Windows drivers supplied with the amp on a CD-ROM. (Macs need no additional drivers.) In addition, there's a Type A USB socket on the front panel, to which iPods, iPhones and iPads can be connected, and built-in aptX Bluetooth for wireless playback from computers, smartphones and tablets.

While the rear of the Rotel is hardly the socketfest its large dimensions suggest (or maybe threaten), there's also a decent range of outputs: as well as two sets of speaker terminals, with A/B switching on the front panel, it has both pre-amp-level outputs – for example for use with an external power amp – and two mono subwoofer outputs. Completing the connectivity is a battery of sockets for integration into custom installations – 12V trigger outputs, external remote input, Rotel Link in/out and an RS232 computer control socket – and there's also a network connection, although this is only for updates and the like, not for streaming audio.

PERFORMANCE

The Rotel is very simple to set up and use: aside from some functions hidden away in the menu system, including balance and tone controls (the latter bypassable for the best sound) and fixed gain (for use with a home cinema receiver or processor) on any input, what you see is more or less what you get. Connect up sources and speakers, and you're all set.

From the off, the RA-1592 lives up to expectations in that it's a mighty powerful amplifier able to drive and control even demanding speakers with almost disdainful ease, thanks in no small part to generous power-supply provision built around a hefty toroidal transformer. That means a sound both big and bold, capable of striking speed, huge dynamic

swings and wide-open ambience, but only when required: although this amplifier doesn't temper or smooth the sound at all, neither does it ever sound brash or excessively aggressive. Well, not unless it's fed from sources with those characteristics, anyway. While there are those who might find the sound here a little too revealing and wish for a hint more lushness and warmth, there's no shortage of bass extension or fluidity – just a fairly ruthless honesty about the quality of the signal being delivered to the input sockets, although of course those with bright-sounding discs in their collections can always resort to the tone controls, which are accessible directly from the remote control handset.

The Rotel is equally as impressive whether you use its phono stage with a turntable, the line inputs (although for the best CD performance I'd use the balanced ins, provided the player in use supports them) or the digital section, which uses tried and tested 768kHz/32 bit digital-to-analogue conversion from AKM. The digital input performance is particularly impressive, whether playing CD-quality music in through the conventional digital inputs or ultra-hi-res DSD files using the USB-B connection from a computer.

Fed with DSD files from the likes of 2L or NativeDSD, the Rotel is able to show a combination of sparkle and richness that's hard to match with CD-quality files, while the extra detail afforded by hi-res PCM content, such as the recent 'own label' Berlin Philharmonic set of Beethoven symphonies under Simon Rattle, is readily apparent in improved openness and 'air' in the sound. Meanwhile, the excellent sound stage focus and imaging is testament to the dual-mono design within the amplifier, ensuring fine stereo separation.

But, best of all, the Rotel has that wonderful free-breathing sense of power and space, along with the delicacy to handle even the most intricate and subtle music. With Cristian Budu's lovely set of Chopin Preludes and Beethoven Bagatelles, the precision and speed of the amplifier, along with that unrestrained dynamic ability, give the piano impressive impact and almost palpable presence (helped by a remarkable recording quality).

Or you could try...

We've been here before, as these pages have – in recent months – seen several amplifiers in the same market sector as the Rotel RA-1592.

Marantz HD-AMP 1

If you wanted to get close to this kind of level of performance on a tighter budget, you could look at the £800 Marantz HD-AMP 1, which is much more compact than the RA-1592. It offers less power but has proved itself capable of driving big, demanding speakers in a convincing fashion. See more at marantz.co.uk.



Cambridge Audio CXA80 amplifier

The CXA80 amplifier from Cambridge Audio, like the Marantz, has a range of digital and analogue inputs and a healthy 80W-per-channel output, all in a unit of conventional hi-fi proportions, sleekly designed. It sells for £750: find out more at cambridgeaudio.com.



Musical Fidelity M3si

Finally, a simpler amplifier from a well-regarded British name in the form of the £1000 Musical Fidelity M3si. It may not have the ultra-hi-res audio capability of some of its rivals here but this is a no-nonsense, solid amplifier with plenty of power, purposeful looks and a sound combining weight with subtlety and finesse. More information at musicalfidelity.com.



Meanwhile, the power and attack of Steven Isserlis's cello in the Elgar Concerto is thrilling, and its tone and timbre beautifully realised.

A big amplifier? Yes, definitely – but it will take up less space than most pre-amplifier/power amplifier combinations while delivering similar performance, and is as easy to use as it is enjoyable. ☺

● REVIEW AUDIOLAB M-DAC+

Audiolab's latest-generation DAC

Compact converter offers superb sound and wide-ranging format compatibility

When it comes to digital-to-analogue converters, Audiolab has been designing and making products almost as long as any manufacturer. Its first model, the 8000DAC, was launched to widespread acclaim back in the days when the brand was an independent company, and Audiolab has continued to launch innovative products since its acquisition first by TAG McLaren Audio and then, when that adventure was terminated, by IAG.

Still with headquarters in Huntingdon, the brand is now part of the same stable as Castle, Mission, Quad and Wharfedale, with products manufactured in the parent company's huge facility in Shenzhen, China. As the '+' suffix suggests, the product we have here is the latest version of Audiolab's original M-DAC, designed to sit alongside that model in the range, rather than replacing it. Selling for £800 against the £600 M-DAC, itself about £200 more than the stripped-down Q-DAC, the new model promises a higher level of performance and wider-ranging format compatibility.

The market isn't exactly short of high-quality DACs – there are decidedly more of them now than when the M-DAC first appeared a little over four years ago – but the new model is definitely on trend with its compact design, just under 25cm wide, and generous choice of digital inputs. As well as two optical and two coaxial ins, there's an AES/EBU socket, a Type B USB for computer hook-up and an iOS-compliant USB Type A for iPods, iPhones and iPads. Both the AES/EBU input and the USB-A are new for this model.

Despite the similarities to the M-DAC, the '+' model is in fact a completely new design, right down to the metalwork. In fact, one of the few things not to have changed is the conversion system at the heart of the unit, which is the well-regarded ESS Sabre32 9018 32-bit DAC chipset. However, it can now handle PCM files all the way up to 384kHz/24 bit, and also DSD64/128/256.

The chassis has been changed, bringing the display to the centre of the front panel and giving it the rounded edges found in the latest 8300-series 'full width' Audiolabs. The casework is also taller and deeper to accommodate the upgraded power supply, now moved inside the box with a transformer using multiple windings to



AUDIOLAB M-DAC+

Type Digital-to-analogue converter

Price £800

Digital inputs Two optical, two coaxial, AES/EBU, USB-A with iOS compatibility, asynchronous USB-B

Digital outputs Optical, coaxial

Analogue outputs RCA phono and balanced XLR, fixed or variable level, headphones

Other connections Infrared flasher output, two 12V trigger outputs

Formats decoded Up to 192kHz/24 bit on optical/coaxial/AES; USB-B extends to 384kHz/32 bit and DSD64/128/256

Accessories supplied Remote handset, drivers on CD-ROM

Dimensions (WxHxD) 24.7x11.4x29.2cm

audiolab.co.uk

feed separate regulation for the digital and analogue sections. Rotary controls sit either side of the display, one to adjust the volume on the analogue outputs (on both RCA sockets and balanced XLRs, with two fixed output options also available), the other to select inputs. The remote control adds extra options, including a choice of digital filters: seven for listening to PCM audio and four more for use when playing DSD content. In addition, one can set the parameters for jitter reduction, choose a default input, adjust display brightness and information, and turn the automatic standby system on and off. The M-DAC+ also has 12V trigger outputs so you could, for example, connect it directly to one of Audiolab's power amplifiers and have that turn on and off in concert with the DAC.

PERFORMANCE

All those options mean that, while the M-DAC+ is basically 'plug and play' with a computer – although you'll need to install the drivers on the supplied CD-ROM to use it with a Windows machine – some experimentation with the various menu options will be needed to adjust the sound to suit the user's tastes. Having spent some time doing just that with the filter

selector, it soon became clear that personal preferences should be the guide here, and that there is no 'correct' setting. I'd merely caution that it's best to find an option you like (a choice which will have much to do with the sound of the rest of your system) and stick with it – constantly changing filters to suit the music playing is quite possibly the path to madness!

There's no doubting the DAC's ability to reveal the details of a recording, even when things get busy

It's worth noting that the inside of the M-DAC+ is pretty tightly packed, and as a result the unit can run a bit warm in use: this is nothing to worry about, however, although it can be surprising at first. The trade-off for all this, however, is a sound bursting with vitality. The Audiolab is far from soft and smooth; and while there's a hint of lightness in the bass and a slight lack of substance on big orchestral recordings such as the Seattle Symphony's live Mahler Tenth in 96kHz/24 bit, there's no doubt that the DAC's ability to reveal the details of a recording, even when things get busy.

Tight, clean and wonderfully agile, the sound here manages to tread that fine line between maximum information and overbright edginess, delivering fine insight into recordings without aggravating treble-happy speakers into unruly behaviour. The result is a sound with a more 'organic' feel than I recall from the original M-DAC, which was certainly revealing but did occasionally sound a bit artificial with some recordings.

Yes, a little more warmth wouldn't go amiss, and that's something perhaps to tackle with the digital filters on offer: using the 'Minimum Phase' option can smooth things a bit, giving the impression of a little more generosity to the sound. As I said, it's worth experimenting in your own system, but to these ears that filter did make solo piano, for example, sound a little weightier without losing any significant sense of definition and insight.

In what is becoming a crowded market, Audiolab has done a fine job of upping its game, producing a very grown up DAC with a very competitive price. This is definitely one worth auditioning. **G**

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ESSAY

'Streaming? It's a complement to a music collection, not its replacement.'

Recent suggestions that streaming could replace downloads within a few years has Andrew Everard wondering about the future of the way we listen

So that's it. I've only got three years to buy and download all the music I ever want to listen to before the whole antiquated idea of paying for files and having them sent over the internet to me becomes a part of history, replaced by the dream world of on-demand access to the world's greatest music libraries.

Or at least that's how one market analyst sees it. Well, sort of: according to US-based data information provider Nielsen, reporting on the state of the American music market, streaming services are seeing a huge growth in use, while sales of digital downloads were down over the first six months of this year: single-track sales by some 24 per cent and albums 18 per cent, although the rise of streaming means 'total digital consumption' was up 15 per cent.

Based on those figures, the suggestion is that by 2020 the digital download market for single tracks will be gone, followed by the album market a year later, with some even suggesting that Apple will pull the plugs on its iTunes store around about that time and instead concentrate on its Apple Music streaming service (or whatever it's called by then).

But the numbers don't quite add up, as the same report suggests that three albums sold over a million units (ie copies, either digital or physical, as CDs or LPs) in the first half of 2016, whereas only one album hit that mark a year ago. Just to put that into some kind of perspective, the Nielsen figures claim 113.6 billion tracks were streamed in the USA between January and June this year, or around 431,000 per minute.

Meanwhile, Apple is making moves in the streaming arena, with rumours that it's targeting the Tidal service as a takeover candidate, even though no one's quite sure why. The 'glass half full' brigade will have you believe this indicates a commitment on Apple's part to higher-quality music streams than it currently offers on its Music service, Tidal currently offering



Politics aside, I have deeper problems with a world in which we become entirely reliant on streaming services

CD-resolution FLAC streams and being a partner of MQA, the technology designed to shunt hi-res music around without the need for ultra-fast internet connections.

The 'glass half empty' merchants suggest, however, that Apple's designs on Tidal are somewhat more prosaic: it wants to bring those artists currently only offering their music via the Jay Z-fronted service back into the Apple Music fold, in order to strengthen its grip on the global music market. And higher-resolution streaming? You can go whistle for that one...

But then almost any move Apple makes tends to divide opinion, for example its recent announcement that it was proposing a simplified method for compensating artists whose music is available on streaming services. In a proposal to the US Copyright Royalty Board, it pitched a flat rate of \$0.00091 per stream, meaning that a payment of \$910 would be made for every million times a track is streamed. Hardly a fortune, maybe, but at least artists would know where they stood, whereas at the moment just about every streaming service has its own rates of pay.

Hats in the air and smiles all round then? Not quite: the Apple proposal would mean the same payment for every stream, whereas

Spotify, for example, pays artists less for tracks streamed via its free service, which is why some performers' music isn't on the ad-funded service, and users must pay to subscribe to access their content.

The Apple model would jeopardise the availability of the free Spotify service but then Apple doesn't have a free option beyond the three-month trial it offers new users of its Apple Music platform. Oh, and some analysts have pointed out that the proposals, if accepted, might not apply to

Apple Music, as the company has already done direct deals with music rights holders. And the cynic might just say the \$910 per million charge is just Apple's way of undermining Spotify, clearing the way for wider uptake of its own service.

Politics aside, I have deeper problems with a brave new world in which we become entirely reliant on streaming services for our future music needs. Yes, the current services have much to offer as a means of exploring new or unknown music, and even getting some idea – but only some – of the quality of a recording; but, as a sole music source, they're not for me.

For a start, there's the sound quality problem, in that the majority of these services don't actually do much for me on audio grounds, not to mention the need to subscribe to a number of services in order to get anything like a complete choice of music. OK, so that's something we should be used to in these new multi-platform entertainment days, where your favourite TV programme might well dictate which TV service you choose to buy.

But, most of all, I'd hate to be reliant on an internet service, with all the vagaries of outages, usage throttling and the demands of all my neighbours on the local cable bandwidth. After all, if the service goes down, I'd hate to be sitting staring at my hi-fi system wondering when I might have my streaming back.

After all, I can live without internet access for a while, but music...

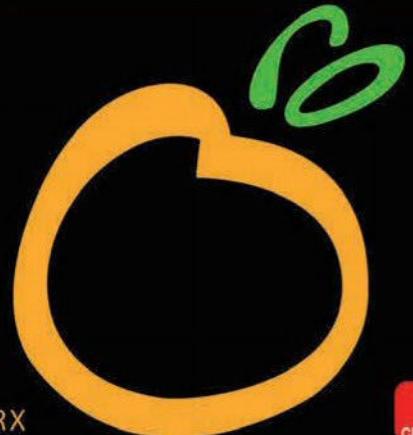
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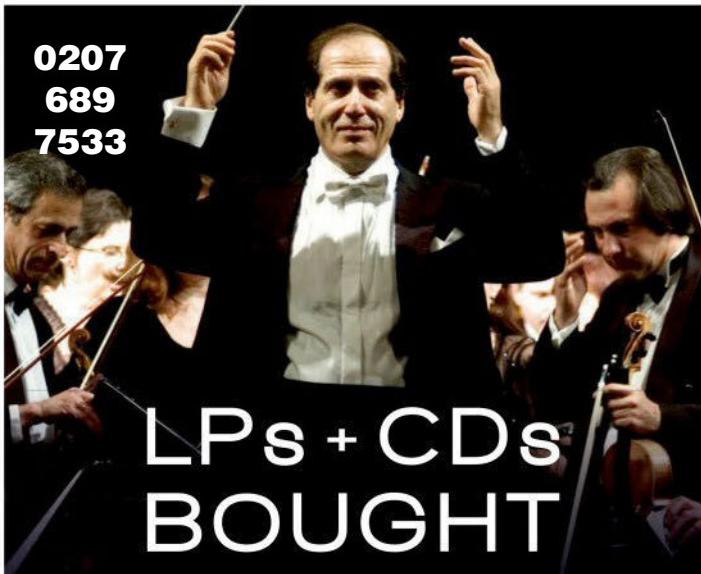
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NOTES & LETTERS

Why 'Hymnus' had to be recorded • Szell's Missa solemnis • Cole Porter vs Brahms

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Szell's Missa solemnis

In his letter in your September issue, Gerald Funnel praises Harnoncourt's valedictory CD of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* and prefers it to the famous recordings by Kleiber and Toscanini. But most lovers of this work have probably missed the recording by George Szell which the Cleveland Orchestra issued on the centenary of Szell's birth. The performance is from 1967, Robert Shaw's last year as choral director. It is no longer offered for sale by the Cleveland Orchestra and apparently there are no plans to reissue it. Hearing Szell's reading was for me like hearing this work for the first time. It has the clarity and transparency for which Szell made the Cleveland famous. No other conductor I have heard takes the *Gloria* at the breathtaking speed heard here. The recording more closely resembles that heard on DVD when Harnoncourt performed it with the Amsterdam Concertgebouw about four years ago.

*Morris T Reagan
Madison, Mississippi*

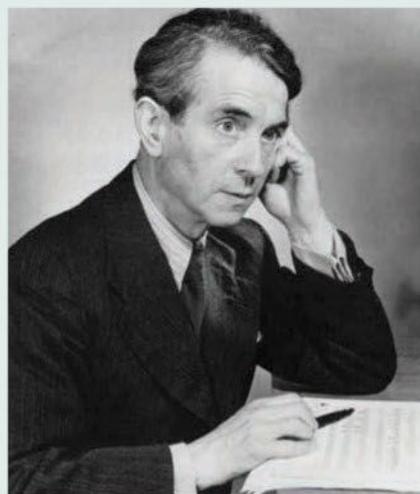
Rostropovich remembered

Martin Cullingford's September editorial 'Music can help to heal the divisions in society' sparked my memory of the Prom in 1968 when Rostropovich played Dvořák's Cello Concerto on the day the Russian tanks entered Prague. When Evgeny Svetlanov came on to the platform to conduct the State Orchestra of the USSR he had to wait to begin as a virtual riot ensued. I felt sorry for the members of the orchestra who must have felt caught up in something for which they could hardly take responsibility. The famous performance with Rostropovich was heard without interruption. However, what will always stay with me is what followed. The orchestra had left the stage and Rostropovich returned alone, and played solo Bach to this huge audience. A kind of balm descended. I have kept only a few concert programmes over the years but this is one I treasure.

*Andrew Brownlie,
York*

Porter: not a patch on Brahms?
What precisely does John Wilson mean (September, page 16) when he states that a Cole Porter song is as well-crafted as a

Letter of the Month



Howells's 'Hymnus' found a champion in Willcocks

Praise for Howells

May I write to say how significant it is to have Herbert Howells's incandescent *Hymnus Paradisi* discussed in Classics Reconsidered (August, page 100). I was lucky enough to have been one of those fortunate choristers involved in singing the semi-chorus for this recording. The occasion is indelibly engraved on my memory. We, the King's College Choir, were positioned on 'the stage' of Kingsway Hall behind the orchestra, who were below us, while the Bach Choir filled the audience gallery above.

David Willcocks conducted from a podium at the front of the stalls and Robert Tear and Heather Harper were positioned to the right. I still have a very vivid recollection of the climax of the 'Sanctus', where Harper soared up to her high A crescendo to resolve on to a *fff*'G – and the various shades of pink to magenta her face turned! Howells came and spoke to us all at the end of the day to express his profound gratitude for our work in recording this piece. It was a very special occasion for all of us.

For me, this recording remains my absolute favourite. Perhaps I have cause for bias, but it is very important to realise how significant this recording was at a time when Howells was virtually an unknown name beyond the cloister. Willcocks was a lifelong supporter of Howells's work; he was a superb conductor with such innate feeling for this music. In truth, I have always felt that the only reason this recording is not any clearer is because it is analogue – one had to have been there at the sessions to understand that! To suggest that David should have handed over the reins of conducting the recording to Boult seems a very narrow view. In my opinion, none could have done it better than Willcocks!

*Nigel Waugh
Settle, North Yorkshire*

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Brahms symphony? One might say the same about a Sousa march, but which of them has greater claims to posterity?

In an environment where serious classical music needs all the support it can get, I believe it ill behoves distinguished musicians to make that type of comment which nowadays is all too common, gulling the enquiring listener into the belief that they can satisfy their cultural craving with *Kiss Me, Kate* rather than *Tristan*. Why, they may think, should we bother with the latter, which demands a much higher level of commitment (but which ultimately

rewards the listener with a transcendental quality which Cole Porter et al could only dream of)? One may equally say to a youngster trying to discover high art: 'Don't bother with the Sistine Chapel, here's a book of Giles cartoons instead.'

*Laurence Dooley
Bishop's Stortford, Herts*

Editorial note

In September (page 56), we reviewed Jurowski's *Petrushka* in a Collector feature. To clarify, the orchestra was the LPO and the recording on the LPO's own label.

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OBITUARIES

A Finnish composer, and the Medici's leader and a lyric soprano

EINOJUHANI RAUTAVAARA

Composer

Born October 9, 1928

Died July 27, 2016



During his long and prolific career, Einojuhani Rautavaara, who has died aged 87, became the dominant voice of Finnish contemporary music in the post-Sibelius era.

Born to an opera-singer father and doctor mother Rautavaara studied composition at the Sibelius Academy. He first came to wider attention when *A Requiem for our Time* (1953) won the international Thor Johnson competition. Crucially for Rautavaara, he came to Sibelius's attention too, and when in 1955 the Grand Old Man of Finnish culture was asked to nominate a young Finnish composer to attend the Juilliard School, he chose Rautavaara. Rautavaara's musical voice travelled on quite a path, from neo-classical early works, through serialism, arriving in the '80s at a distinctive, mystical sound world, at once modern yet accessible.

More than 150 compositions include 12 concertos, eight symphonies, chamber music, a large body of choral music and nine operas. One of his first popular works was the *Cantus Articus* (1972), a concerto for pre-recorded birdsong and orchestra. But it was his Seventh Symphony of 1994, *Angel of Light*, that brought his music to a much wider audience. Throughout his career, the Ondine label supported him with a dedication that any composer would envy.

Just as Sibelius helped Rautavaara, so Rautavaara nurtured the next generation, Paavo Heininen and Kalevi Aho being among his pupils.

PAUL ROBERTSON

Violinist

Born November 1, 1952

Died July 26, 2016



Paul Robertson, leader of the Medici Quartet for 40 years, has died at 63. He entered the Royal Academy of Music at 15, and four years later the Medici was formed.

Over the next four decades the Medicis made more than 50 recordings, including a Beethoven cycle for Nimbus, worked with composers including Elizabeth

Lutyens, John Tavener, Peter Maxwell Davies and Richard Rodney Bennett, and performed quintets with Clifford Curzon.

The relationship between music and the mind was of longstanding interest to Robertson, leading to collaborations with scientists and a Channel 4 television series. In 2007 he was interviewing John Tavener when the composer said that he wanted to write a piece for four string quartets, exploring, as Robertson related to *Gramophone*, 'the relationship between dying and the creative consciousness, and how music comes from the edge of ordinary existence'. A few days after finishing the piece Tavener collapsed, and shortly afterwards Robertson suffered an aortic dissection, leaving him unconscious in intensive care for many weeks. With both musicians still recovering, the piece, called *Towards Silence*, was premiered. 'We both agreed that this piece was not ordinary for either of us,' said Robertson. 'It never was, really.'

DANIELA DESSÌ

Soprano

Born May 14, 1957

Died August 20, 2016



The possessor of one of the loveliest lyric voices of recent times, Dessì studied in Parma and Siena and went on to win a number of competitions, notably one organised by RAI in 1980, the year she made her stage debut in Pergolesi's *La serva padrona*.

Her career was largely focused on her native Italy – and she rarely sang in a language other than Italian – but she had a wide-ranging repertoire that stretched from the Baroque (Handel and Vivaldi) via Mozart (she performed *Don Giovanni*, *Le nozze di Figaro*, *Così fan tutte* and *La clemenza di Tito* under Riccardo Muti's baton) and the *bel canto* (she sang Norma, Maria Stuarda and some lesser-known Rossini), to Verdi and the *verismo* composers (many Puccini roles). Guest appearances included singing at New York's Met, the Royal Opera, Covent Garden and in Barcelona and Vienna.

On record, Dessì can be heard as Aida, Mimì, Turandot, Madama Butterfly, Minnie (*Fanciulla del West*), Fiordiligi (*Così*), Elena (*I vespri siciliani*), Norma, Violetta (*Traviata*), Elisabeth (*Don Carlo*), Nedda (*I Pagliacci*) and in Leoncavallo's *I Medici* (an Editor's Choice in July 2010).

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Nicholas Parsons

The entertainer and presenter of Radio 4's 'Just a Minute' on missed opportunities, hearing jazz pianist Oscar Peterson and encountering live music for the first time

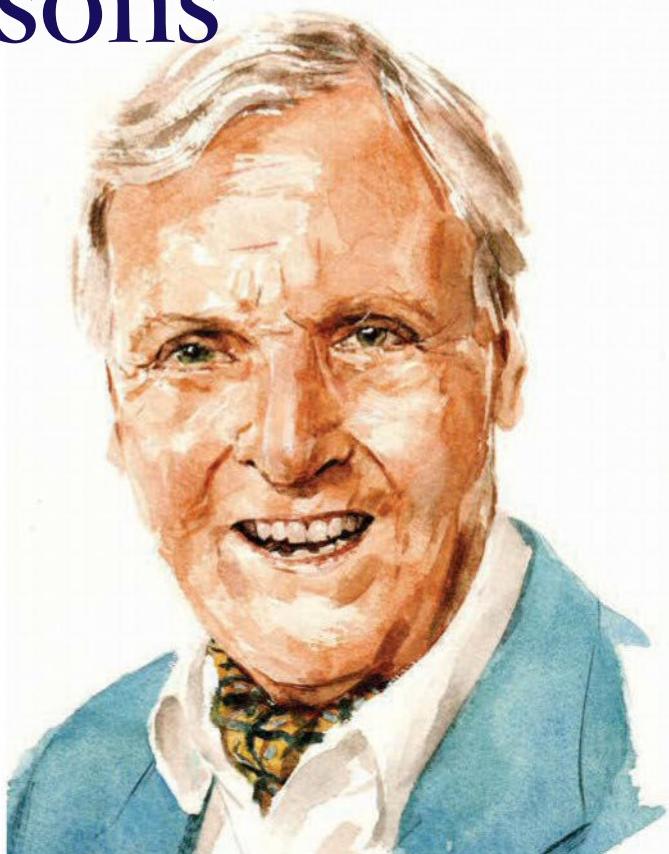
My childhood wasn't musical, exactly, but the artistic side was there. My father was a doctor, but he was very creative – he did lovely paintings and was a brilliant photographer. My mother used to play the piano but, having married someone for whom music didn't mean so much, she caved in. So we didn't hear a great deal of music. Then again, there wasn't much around. Gramophones were antiquated, there was no television... We only heard music in the mornings at school and when we went to the cinema or the theatre.

When I was at my boarding prep school (which I hated) I was given piano lessons (which I loved). But my mother was reluctant to encourage me in my desire to be on the stage, so when my music teacher told her I'd been heard practising on my own, she replied: 'No doubt with one hand in C and the other in D!' She eventually decided I shouldn't bother with lessons anymore, which is very sad – it would have been invaluable to be able to accompany myself in cabaret.

When I was 16, my parents got me an engineering position in Glasgow. In my free time, I'd go to Green's Playhouse to hear big band concerts. At that time, Joe Loss was at his peak and his band's signature tune 'In the Mood' would be played all the time. And so I finally got to encounter live music. Then, when I got into shows with music after the war, I became aware of all the great performers of that period – 'Hutch', who did numbers like Cole Porter's 'Let's Do It', Ella Fitzgerald, Frank Sinatra, Nat King Cole, Dean Martin... I discovered a real passion for jazz, which has stayed with me. I adore Oscar Peterson and went to hear him play in Soho. The piano is my favourite instrument, and I'm lost in admiration watching jazz pianists running their fingers over the keyboard.

Music is an essential background to showbusiness. Early on in my career, I got into a late-night review show at the Watergate Theatre, off The Strand, and it had lots of musical numbers. I'm not a singer, but I can hold a tune. And I've been in musicals of course – *Charlie Girl*, *Into the Woods* and *The Rocky Horror Show*. I used to go to the theatre, too. I remember going to see *Oklahoma!* – I've got the soundtrack on CD. I love the sound of a full orchestra, and greatly admire the work of conductors. But nowadays, I mostly listen to music on the radio. I'm a great one for the spoken word, so it tends to be Radio 4, but I love Jazz FM too.

I'm looking forward to the 'My Music' concert at St John's, Smith Square in November. Choosing my favourite pieces and hearing them played by an orchestra will be a real treat. Chopin's *Minute Waltz* is an obvious choice – it's integral to the radio show I've been a part of for nearly 50 years. I've also chosen Oscar Peterson's *Night Train*, Ella Fitzgerald's 'Just



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one of those things', Nat King Cole's 'Unforgettable' and Gershwin's 'Summertime' – jazz is my passion, after all. And I like the lighter side of classical music, which is why I've chosen Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* ('Spring' is my favourite) and Rimsky-Korsakov's *Flight of the Bumblebee*.

I was narrator for Sondheim's *Into the Woods* in 1990 and he writes such clever lyrics – they're so revealing of human nature. There's nothing truer than the words in 'Children will listen', which I've also included in the St John's concert; it's an emotive and beautiful song, and reminds you to be careful of what you say – if it's not healthy information you're passing on, it could warp their little minds. I loved it when my children were small and evolving – those were magic times.

When I was younger, I used to love going to the ballet. Tchaikovsky's *The Nutcracker* was one of my favourites, so I had to include some of that music in the programme, too. As for Beethoven's *Pastoral*, this piece just makes you stop and listen until it's finished – you can't have it any other way. **¶** *Nicholas Parsons appears with the Orchestra of St John's in 'My Music' at St John's, Smith Square, on November 24; for information on this, and other concerts in the series, visit sjss.org.uk*

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